THE VETERAN

Vietnam Veterans Against the War

Volume 47, Number 2 Fall 2017

VVAW Still Teaching the American War in Vietnam: On Burns/Novick "The Vietnam War"

JOE MILLER

From the National Office

For fifty years, VVAW has had three continuing missions: agitation to end our war and stop wars like it; therapy in action and discussion for those who fought the war and needed to deal with what was then called Post-Vietnam Syndrome (now PTSD); and, ultimately, education for our members and supporters to try to make sense out of the senselessness of our war and to teach the public about what we experienced and how to be on guard against future wars of that type. VVAW has continued those missions since our earliest days; we set them out clearly in the first issue of our official publication *The 1st Casualty* (www.vvaw.org/veteran)

In the early 1970s, while the war was still being fought, VVAW members traveled to northern Vietnam as part of peace delegations. For example, Barry Romo who served in combat during the 1968 Tet Offensive, joined peace activist Joan Baez and former Nuremburg Prosecutor Telford Taylor on a trip to Hanoi in December 1972, during the so-called "Christmas bombing". They witnessed firsthand the destruction of schools and hospitals. Barry returned to the US to speak publicly about these acts and to give witness to the atrocities being committed against the Vietnamese people.

We fought against the onslaught of revisionist history in the 80s, when Reagan was describing Vietnam as an "honorable war". Popular culture, via "Rambo" and films of that ilk, put forth the proposition that we could've "won" the Vietnam War, but were held back. And, the "evil" Vietnamese were supposedly still holding prisoners from the war. We challenged all of this through speaking in high schools and colleges, trying to break through the mythologies that had been constructed since the end of the war.

With the release of films like "Platoon," we saw greater opportunities to engage with the public. Questions were being asked about the war that had lain dormant for years. With more films that challenged the official narrative about the war, we found new interest in VVAW and its history. There was a clear rise in academic and popular discussions about the role VVAW played during the war. This has continued well into the current era.

Now, 50 years later, while there are many who view the Vietnam war as ancient history and know little about it, there are also those who thought they knew what the war was about who are now challenged by the new documentary series written and produced by Ken Burns and Lynn Novick for PBS, "The Vietnam War". We applaud

VVAW in Washington DC, July 4, 1974.

Ken Burns, Lynn Novick and PBS for bringing an in depth exploration of the war on the Vietnamese into the contemporary discussion, potentially a new tool for educating about the war and its aftermath.

Over the decades, documentary films like "Different Sons" (1971), "Only the Beginning" (1972), and "Winter Soldier" (1972) were very important in our education and agitation efforts. We realized long ago, that there are conflicting versions of what happened, though we learned, through our own experience, that the US had no business involving us in the lives of the Vietnamese people and sending us there to kill them for illegitimate and immoral reasons. Like many documentaries of this nature, there is much to say. And in the age of the Internet, everyone has a place to say it. Many condemned the entire series before viewing any of it. We in VVAW do not agree with every viewpoint expressed or every conclusion drawn. Even VVAW members have different takes on the series, as evidenced by the very lively debate on our Facebook page. That is to be expected, and it is healthy.

From this writer's perspective, I learned much about the war on the ground that had never come through in such stark images and testimony by warriors on both sides. However, I was disappointed by the apparent acceptance of the official story surrounding the Gulf of Tonkin "incidents". While Burns/Novick did not accept the claim

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VVAW 50th Celebrations

VVAW

VVAW held two gatherings in September to celebrate our 50th Anniversary.

September 10, 2017 we gathered in Milwaukee in the back room of the historic Falcon Bowl. John Zutz secured the premises and some food. Mark Runle brought more food. Barry Romo and Jim and Sukie Wachtendonk brought the banners and photo albums to share. VVAW members, friends and family from Madison, Milwaukee, and Chicago caught up and shared memories over drinks. John Lindquist even called in from England.

September 16, 2017 we gathered in New York at Connolly's Pub in the middle of Manhattan. Brian Matarrese and Susan Schnall secured the room (which we've used for many events in the past) and the VVAW 50th anniversary cake. Jan Barry gave a brief overview of VVAW's early days, Bill Ehrhart read some poetry, Frank Toner read a statement from Al Hubbard, Michael McPhearson of VFP presented VVAW a plaque for our 50th. Lots of old friends gathered to listen and celebrate, including members of other groups, such as IVAW.

U.S. OUT OF SOUTHERN AFRICA!
Victory to the Liberation Struggles!
VIETNAM VETERANS AGAINST THE WAR
Vets Say "We've Had Enough"
TREAT AGENT ORANGE!
VIETNAM VETERANS AGAINST THE WAR

VVAW banners hanging in the back room of the Polish Falcon Bowl in Milwaukee.

Here are some excerpts from Al Hubbard's statement:

Greetings !

A very proud salute to all my sisters and brothers of VVAW for 50 years of service to our country.

I have a very special place in my heart for Jan Barry, who introduced me to VVAW and along with Jon Bjornsen, the late Carl Rogers and the other founding members, allowed me to sit in the National Office with Madelyn Moore at my side during those formative years. Madelyn was my compass in the steering of VVAW.

A very warm thanks to our Regional Coordinators, Barry Romo, John Kerry, Ed Damato, and all those who helped form and expand VVAW,

I salute my dear friends, Marty Webster, Bill Branson and the entire staff of the National Office, and we must thank the Milwaukee Chapter who have put their emphasis on advocating for our sisters and brothers suffering the ravages of Agent Orange, and require assistance navigating the VA system.

VVAW still has work to do.

This month I celebrate my 83rd birthday, pleased at having recovered from brain surgery. I pledge my remaining energy to the fight.

Thank you VVAW for what you've done, what you are doing, and more importantly what you can do to keep our country great.

see photos of VVAW's 50th on page 8

VIETNAM VETERANS AGAINST THE WAR

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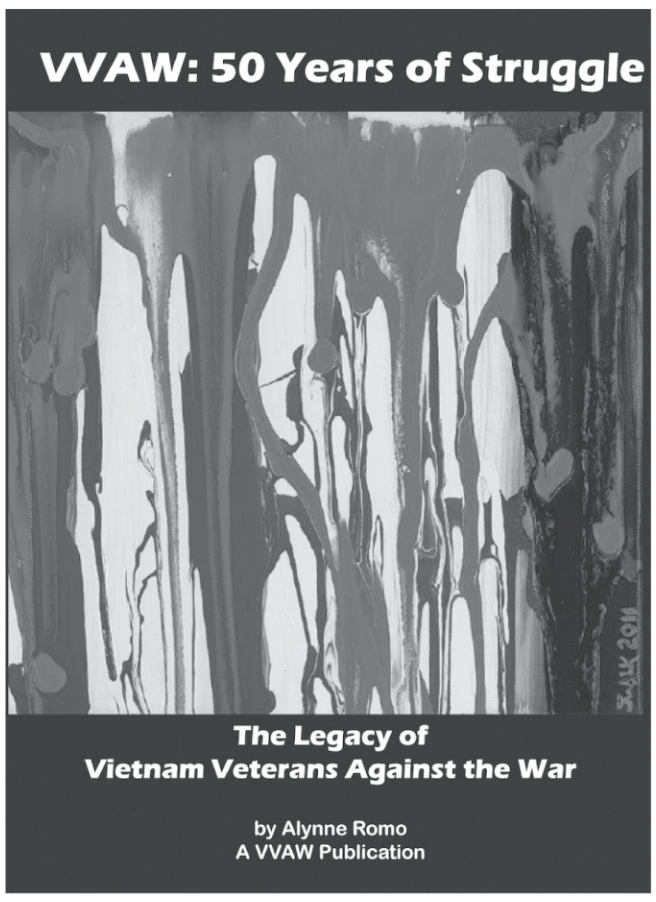
Available Soon: VVAW 50 Years of Struggle



VVAW: 50 Years of Struggle
The Legacy of Vietnam Veterans Against the War

The book describes the moving history of VVAW over five decades and provides a timeline of VVAW's positions, protests, and takeovers. It also sets those powerful actions in the context of each era, starting with topics ranging from the impact of the civil rights movement, to the draft, to flawed operations in Vietnam.

By following five decades of VVAW, the reader also sees the evolution of US foreign policy mired in war crimes and domination; the intergenerational failures of the Veterans Administration; the unfolding of the story of Agent Orange; and much, much more.

The book will delight members of VVAW, but it is also written so that they may be understood—so that others can glimpse inside the world of these anti-war veterans and understand why they stood together and defied the wars, the racism, and the injustices of their times.

Published by and for VVAW, research for the book relied on VVAW archives. In addition to telling the overall history of the organization itself, it also thanks over 450 members who helped drive and inspire the organization. Fully indexed for use in libraries and classrooms.

Available for $19.95 soon, Stay tuned to VVAW's website and Facebook page for release details.

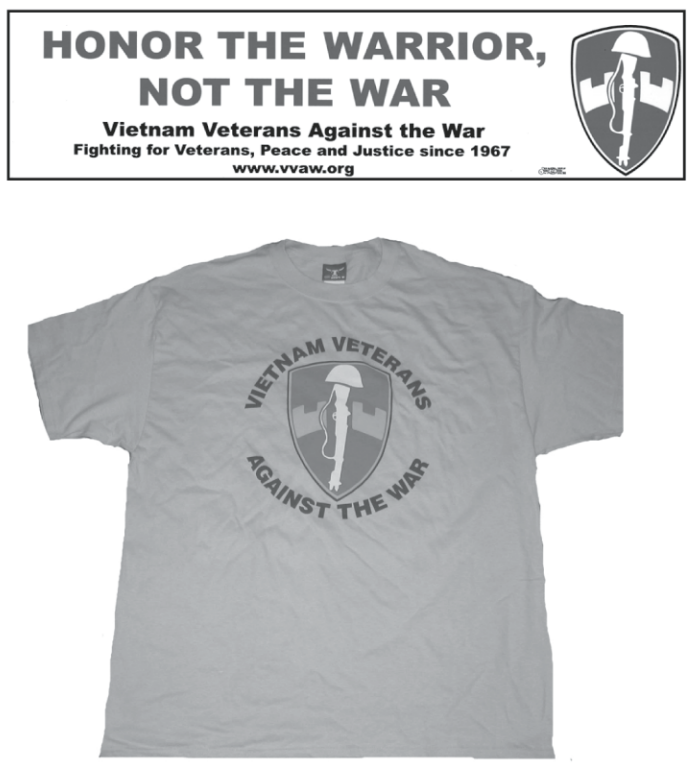
Truth, it is said, is war's first casualty. Memory is its second.—Tom Hayden, anti-war activist

Veteran Staff

Jeff Machota Bill Branson
Ellie Shunas Jen Tayabji

Thanks to Jeff Danziger and Billy Curmano for their cartoons. Thanks to Kim Scipes, Joe Petzel, Jeff Machota, Bill Branson, Richard Brummett, John Crandell, Anthonhy Shafton, John Zutz, Ben Chitty, Roberto Clack and others for contributing photos.

VVAW Merchandise



Mail order and check to:
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c/o Dave Kettenhofen
3550 East Lunham Avenue
Saint Francis, WI 53235

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vvaw@vvaw.org

Below is a list of VVAW coordinators and national staff. If you need a speaker for an event, class visit, or interview, please contact the National Office at (773) 569-3520 or email vvaw@vvaw.org and we will put you in touch with the nearest VVAW member.

VVAW
National Coordinators:

Bill Branson
Ann Hirschman
Brian Matarrese
Joe Miller
Meg Miner
Marty Webster

VVAW
National Staff:

Charlie Branson
Dave "Red" Kettenhofen
Jeff Machota

Teaching Vietnam

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of a second attack on the Maddox and Turner Joy, they did not dispute the US claim that our ships were always in international waters. That is simply not true, as evidenced by documents released by the National Security Agency in 2005.

Also, while colonialism was at least part of the story in the first couple of episodes, there was no recognition of the continued influence of colonial or imperialist interests at the base of the US decision to help France maintain its control over Vietnam. This, in fact, becomes the core of the growth of US involvement from 1945 onwards. Should the Burns/Novick team have covered every detail, every continuing controversy? Is the fact that the Bank of America and at least one of the Koch brothers were among the many, many sponsors of the series at fault here? In a recent interview, VVAW member Bill Ehrhart responded in this way:

> "Has the documentary met your expectations?
>
> Well, yes, but that's because my expectations were limited to begin with. I could hardly have expected Bank of America and David H. Koch to underwrite a scathing expose of US imperialism. There are some very good things about the series, especially in making plain how little hope most American policymakers had of winning the war, and how blatantly those same men lied and lied and lied over and over again to the American people about what was happening and why."

This writer was left with a few "what ifs". Why no mention of the US role in supporting the Chinese invasion of Vietnam in 1979? Why did the US continue to support Pol Pot's regime in the UN? Why no discussion of how the US embargo from 1977 to 1994 was used to "punish" the Vietnamese people for winning their war for independence? Though there was a quick reference to the 300,000 missing on the Vietnamese side, why was the focus on the US missing....if this was supposed to be a "balanced" presentation on the war? Why was there no mention at all of McNamara's "Project 100,000," the program that drafted many who would normally have been unqualified for service? When the former NVA and Viet Cong speak of whether the war was "right" on their side, are we to believe that they really regret fighting for Vietnam's independence? What if the US had left them alone in 1945? Would the "cost" to the Vietnamese people have been as great? Who is really responsible for the pain and suffering by Vietnamese and US troops? We know, but we are still unable or unwilling to admit the US culpability. It was about political and economic control...it was about empire.

While the documentary may be criticized and nit-picked, we in VVAW should see this as a tool to continue our efforts at organizing for veterans and their families who still suffer, fighting for ALL victims of Agent Orange exposure, in the US and in Vietnam. We must remember that reconciliation with, and recognition of, the government of Vietnam was only a first step. There is still much healing to be done, and a huge part of that healing is recognition of the central responsibility of the US government and successive policymakers in the American war against Vietnam and its people.

"My generation, the people who lived through the Vietnam War, learned a great deal from our miserable and tragic experience. I wonder whether the lessons we absorbed at such tremendous cost are being passed on to future generations? If they are not understood, or if they are forgotten, are we doomed to repeat the same mistakes, commit the same crimes, repeat the same disasters, spread the same sorrows?"

—Bao Ninh, NVA Veteran, Author of "The Sorrows of War" [page 463, of the companion book to the PBS series]

Joe Miller is a Navy veteran, 1961-68. Naval Security Group, 1961-64. USS Ticonderoga (CVA14), 1964-66. HELTRARON 8, 1966-68. He is a VVAW National Board Member.

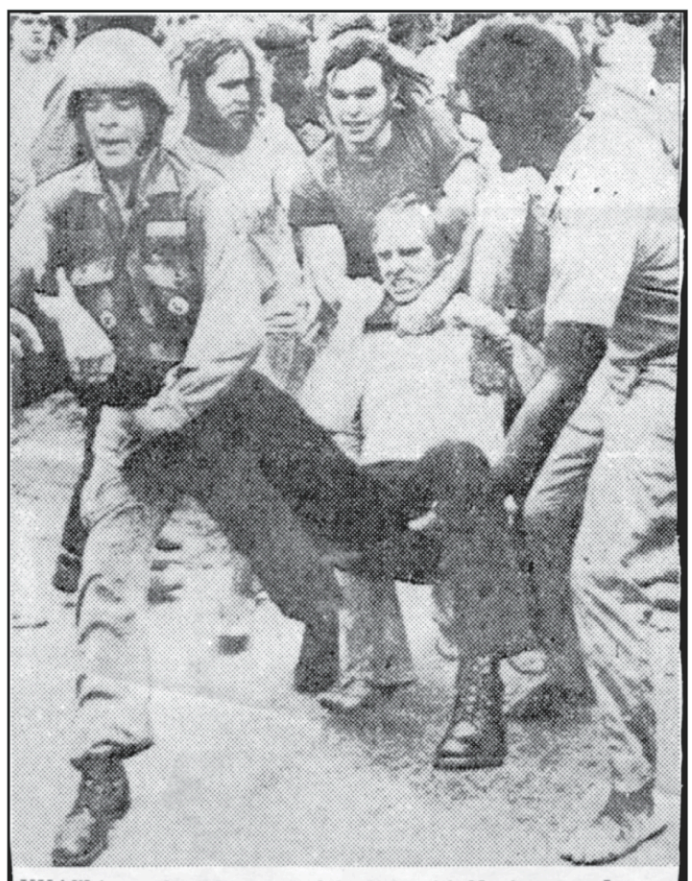
Fighting Racists Then and Now

Barry Romo

VVAW has been anti-racist from the beginning. Whether it was the racism of the generals who drafted and put minorities out of proportion to their percentage on the front lines in Vietnam, the labeling and treating of all Vietnamese as "gooks", or your local KKK groups and Nazis. In the first issue of our newspaper, *The First Casualty*, on the front cover is a picture of Nazis (when you wear a swastika you are a Nazi, not a neo-Nazi). The headline reads: "Lifeline to Cairo" (Illinois). The civil rights labeled it one of the most racist places in America. The local African American minister asked if we could send a convoy to bring attention to what was going on. We did. For years after, in places where African Americans came and asked for support with convoys of goods or just bodies, we went.

In 1972, we brought in 1,500 VVAW member to the Nixon-GOP Convention in Miami Beach, Florida. As the VVAW convoy approached the park where we stayed, to my surprise from behind me on stage, 125 plus Nazis in uniform with swastikas threw me off the stage and chanted: "Nigger lovers", "Jew lovers", "Communists", "Race mixers", etc. They gave the Nazi salute and then we surrounded the stage, to keep them there. We set up a line towards the street and gave them seconds to leave, which they refused. So we dragged half of them off the stage, with no intentions of killing them of course, especially since we didn't want to go to jail, put other non-vets who were demonstrating in danger, and we were wary of a trial against us like the Chicago 8 and Black Panthers had been experiencing. A number of vets on stage got hit with folding chairs and sent to the hospital, we then threw the Nazis out onto the street, dragging their faces through the grass from the stage. Two Vietnam vet motorcycle cops had been assigned to us, and watched this and laughed. The Miami Beach community was gigantically Jewish, with lots of Holocaust survivors and families. We them told the remaining Nazis if they didn't leave they'd be dead. Their faces turned whiter than white, because we were clearly organized and using our military experience to deal with their sorry asses. They did a final Nazi salute and had to walk through a gauntlet of VVAW members towards the street. They had two combat buses, which had their windows covered, swastikas painted on them, along with white power slogans, plus their tires reinforced. The local council people and community members then approached us and opened the bathrooms and showers to us, and brought us lots of beer and pastries. The last night of the GOP convention, the state police rioted against us, tear gassing us and beating us up along with the the rest of the anti-war demonstrators, and the local community took us into their homes and apartments to protect us.

We didn't stop there. In 1977 we went to Washington DC for the National African Liberation Day, in support of the program Fatigues for Freedom Fighters. As we reached the site of the event, American storm troopers wearing swastikas attacked us. We kicked their ass. And threw them out, just like their buddies in Miami Beach, Florida. In the 1980's in Chicago, a large Nazi movement, centered in Marquette Park, had a two and a half story headquarters building with gigantic Nazi flags flying and wall murals with racist slogans such as: "Niggers beware" and "white power". They demanded to march in Skokie, Illinois, a largely Jewish suburb with lots of Holocaust survivors and their families. We formed a coalition that involved non-vets, Holocaust survivors and their families, and students and workers. We marched on the Nazi headquarters in opposition to their existence and their awful threat to the Holocaust survivor's feelings and health. They were becoming world famous, and every time we marched on their headquarters the cops would have their faces turned towards us and their backs to the Nazis who were chanting: "6 million more!" and "What do you call a full car ashtray? Jews from Auschwitz!". We politically defeated them, but we could never physically beat them because the cops defended them, but we tried. The Holocaust survivors and their families supported us and spoke at our events.



VVAW has a long history of dealing with Nazi scum. In 1972 vets demonstrating against the Republican National Convention took some time out to demonstrate hand-to-hand combat with Nazis, bodily tossing them from park.

This history of anti-racist resistance is continued up to today. Part of the reason we could carry out these movements was because of disciplined unity of actions. We now see a resurgence of Nazis, KKK, and alt-right groups. They feel empowered, are not going away, and must be resisted against. We are proud of our history of anti-racism, and now stand side by side with this new generation of anti-racist folks.

Barry Romo has been involved with VVAW since 1971. This article was transcribed by Daniel Corral.

Fraggin'

Bill Shunas

Over what seems to have been most of this year, much ado has been made about the Russian connection with Donald Trump and his entourage. And more specifically there is the question of whether or not the Russians in some way(s) interfered with or influenced the 2016 US elections. It would be offensive if the Russians or outsiders of any sort interfered with our elections Our election system is not the best. It is not very democratic in many ways from gerrymandering to voter suppression. Still, fair elections are something for us as a nation to work towards. And we or any nation should - in principle - ideally choose our leaders without interference from other nations.

So, yes, it would be highly offensive if the results of our last election were altered because of Russian interference. Are we missing something here? In all these months of talk about Russian involvement in our election I haven't seen or heard much about the US involvement in elections as well as in regime change in other countries. We are guilty of that. We don't like it when the Russians do it to us, but what about when we do it to the many? Looking at my trusty world atlas to get an idea of how many nations had their leadership selection interfered with by the United States, I see many. I seem to remember cases in about three dozen countries. In addition to those, I suspect (a) there's some I missed and (b) there's been minor interference in other places that are under the radar. I don't know about Australia or Antarctica, but the other five continents are well represented in CIA and State Department lore as places they've proudly been at work. From Congo to Cuba. From Indonesia to Iraq. From Nicaragua to Namibia. And on it goes.

Sometimes we change the regime in someone else's country by force and/or assassination and sometimes by fudging an election. The obvious example is Vietnam. After the elections there in 1956 we - whoops - there were no elections then. There were supposed to be elections then as mandated in the Geneva Accords. However, Central Intelligence told Eisenhower that the communist Ho Chi Minh would be elected in a fair election. So Ike cancelled the election. After that the US installed a series of presidents in South Vietnam.

The changes in presidents were sometimes carried out by assassination and sometimes in a more peaceful way. Examples of more violent regime change include the ousting of the democratically elected Mosaddegh in Iran in the 1950's. He nationalized the oil companies so he was thrown out in a coup organized by the CIA. Mosaddegh lived. Salvador Allende in Chile wasn't so lucky. He didn't meet our standards so we backed the generals who got rid of him.

Coups and assassinations are the sexy examples, but we have also done the deed in less spectacular ways. The list of countries in which we interfered is long. If the popular will in some distant country didn't match the wishes of the US government, we used whatever means necessary to install the regime we wanted. There were the above mentioned coups. There were the ever popular bags full of money and the endorsement of rigged elections. It seemed like every time a Central American graduate of the School of the Americas at Fort Benning ran for office he'd get 99% of the vote. Pretty popular those Benning grads. Don't forget the wars we used for regime change. Laos lasted as long as Vietnam. We regime changed Saddam Hussein. He was a piece of shit, but we had no right. You can hardly call them wars, but we regime changed Grenada and Panama and the Dominican Republic and Haiti with our military. In many of these actions we performed some degree of violence. Sometimes non-violence worked, but that is no reason for a pat on the back. We need to lose the self-righteousness when complaining about the Russians interfering in our elections. It's not right, but we are equally guilty or more guilty if you consider the volume and the violence.

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So, congratulations to us. Fifty years of VVAW. And now we have Trump. Maybe we didn't work hard enough. So the struggle continues. In various ways over the years we have opposed these fascists. I fondly remember my little opportunity. We were in DC for a march and rally to support those in opposition to Apartheid in South Africa. We and other groups were in this park getting ready to form up to join the march. Must have been two or four thousand of us. Then I look down an adjacent street and see Nazis marching. All five of them. They were carrying a flag which displayed a large swastika and maybe one other sign. A couple of them were wearing some kind of storm trooper uniform.

These five marched along and did a column right, heading into the park. How stupid. And they kept marching single file - right towards us - right towards me. I was baffled. They kept coming. I connected with a punch to the chin. There is no political lesson here. It was surreal. In a second, fellow VVAW members started wailing away. Forming next to us for the anti-Apartheid march were members of the Iranian Students Association (ISA). At that time Iran was ruled by the Shah, and the ISA folks had a visceral hatred of fascists. They descended on the Nazis post haste. There were cops around, mainly sitting on motorcycles getting ready to guide our march. They weren't in a hurry to extricate the Nazis, but eventually they rescued them. Whole thing was bizarre.

I suspect the threat of fascism comes not so much from those who dress in costume, but from those who don't. Those thugs who dress in costume are certainly offensive and dangerous. They are offensive to those who have been the objects of their hate. They are dangerous to those they choose to attack. Whether it's the Nazis or the Klan or other individuals or hate groups they are dangerous as models for wannabees and as symbols of a past that some dream about restoring and as instigators of events like Charlottesville Virginia. While these people are offensive and often dangerous the real fascists are wearing suits and ties, not beige shirts with swastika armbands. Enter Donald Trump stage right. He wants to make America great again. He probably is wishing that he could bring us back to before World War II when proposals of fascism were part of the political discourse.

The only fortunate thing about Trump being president is that he is inept at being president. With a right leaning Congress and a right leaning president much bad legislation could be enacted. "Very bad. Very bad." But he has alienated too many people to be effective. If he doesn't use nuclear options we might be better off than with, for example, Mike Pence who appears stable and knows how to play the game. Pence would do the bidding of the wealthy right wing and may be efficient at it. It felt good to pound some Nazi back in DC forty years ago. I thank VVAW for pointing me in the right direction. We need to watch the fascists with the swastika arm bands, but the coat and tie fascists are at center stage. They are the ones that make the times dangerous.

Bill Shunas is a Vietnam veteran, author and VVAW member in the Chicago chapter.

Notes from the Boonies

Paul Wisovaty

I had an experience a few days ago which gave me a serious dose of humility. As you read on, you will understand that I needed it.

I noted in the Fall 2016 edition of *The Veteran* that WILL - the University of Illinois PBS affiliate - had put some stuff online (I'm not totally sure what that means) which included "links to lesson plans about the Vietnam War, a vast, free digital archive of stories, lesson plans, videos, photos and more, designed to engage teachers and students in all subject areas related to the Vietnam War." I received this information from Moss Bresnahan, CEO of Illinois Public Media. The reason that he was kind enough to send me this nice letter was that I had submitted to an hour and a half interview at WILL, conducted by the University Journalism Department. The final stage of the project, called Downstate Veterans Stories, would be WILL's production of a local TV and radio series about the Vietnam War, to air in conjunction with the Burns/Novick series. Moss was even kind enough to send me a DVD of my interview.

I have watched my DVD a couple of times. OK, that's a lie; I've watched it about forty or fifty times, and every time I watched it I got smarter (or the beer got warmer). My only fear was that, as wise and all-knowing as I came across, those poor other vets won't have much time left to say anything. Hell, Jane Fonda might send me an autographed photo!

So here it comes. Last week I called WILL, inquiring about their local project, in which I would certainly star. Unfortunately, that will not be out (radio only) until October, obviously too late for me to review it for *The Veteran.* I was just about to ask the lady who is co-producing it if she could send me a CD of the thing, but I never got the chance to get that out of my mouth. The first thing she said was "You're not in it."

Say what? I thought I was going to be the star. I'm not even "in it"? Nope. Being a polite and gentlemanly 70-year-old, of course, I thanked her and hung up. As you can probably tell from what I have said so far, I wasn't real happy. But I've gotten over it. If WILL didn't use anything I said, then you know what? Maybe the other vets had something more important to say. And that's just OK. And in the interest of trying to make this column worth the reading, please let me give you the website again. It is will.illinois.edu/vietnam/vietnam-stories. *(Paul's entire intervew is available to stream - ed)* I am certain that there is some really interesting and informative stuff there.

I'm really OK. But it still kind of hurts.

Paul Wisovaty is a member of VVAW. He lives in Tuscola, Illinois. He was in Vietnam with the US Army 9th Division in 1968.

VVAW during Operation Blanket Hill, Kent State, 1990.

Anti-war Veterans Stand Up with Unions to Save the VA

ROBERT CLACK

On September 20th, members of Vietnam & Iraq Veterans Against the War (VVAW & IVAW) and Veterans for Peace Chicago joined 2 public sector unions, the American Federation of Governmental Employee (AFGE) and Service Employees International Union Healthcare Illinois/Indiana (SEIU Healthcare) at a protest at the Jesse Brown VA to tell Trump to staff the VA and to care for veterans. As part of a national effort, the rally was organized by AFGE local 789 in Chicago and it brought together veterans and union members to push back against Trump's privatization and union busting agenda.

"There are real problems at the VA and the administration tries to pit the VA workers and veterans against each other in order to advance a privatization agenda," said IVAW member Aaron Hughes. "While there are problems, we understand the VA saves lives and we can solve these problems by working with unions and supporting workers rights and safe staff levels, not through privatizing the VA."

Although President Trump campaigned on caring for veterans, since his presidency has begun, like many federal agencies, the VA has been subjected to ongoing hiring freezes. According to AFGE there are over 49,000 current vacancies at the VA nationwide. This is coupled with passed and proposed union busting legislation by congress along with a push by the Trump administration to further privatize the VA. Like other public institutions, EPA, public education, ACA/healthcare to name a few, the VA has come under attack by the Trump administration's radical agenda. Unless challenged, Trump's agenda of prioritizing profit over healthcare and replacing or weakening the VA with less efficient privatization schemes is a real threat to veterans healthcare in the coming years.

Fortunately, unions, veterans and community members are uniting and fighting back against this agenda. In the past, IVAW has organized with public sectors unions in Chicago to successfully win changes to better veteran's healthcare at the VA. There are plans in Chicago to relaunch these efforts and once again stand side by side with organized labor to demand safe staffing for workers and quality healthcare for veterans. Together, labor and veterans can challenge the Trump and republican agenda and can protect and strengthen the VA and the public sector at large. The "Save the VA" movement is just getting started in Chicago and the September 20th action was an important step in the beginning of relaunching local organizing efforts.

(l-r) Jesse Cerillo, Aaron Hughes, Roberto Clack, Daniel Corral, Sabrina Waller, Barry Romo

ROBERTO CLACK IS A COMMUNITY ORGANIZER IN CHICAGO AND HAS WORKED IN THE HOUSING, LABOR AND PEACE MOVEMENTS.

VVAW Statement Read Outside Trump's American Legion Speech in Reno

ANTHONY SHAFTON

As soon as we learned that President Trump would address the American Legion on August 23 in Reno, a coalition of local activist groups geared up to stage a protest. We had five days. At the final planning meeting, we honed our message for the press and social media. The title for the demo became "We Stand with Our Veterans – Nevada Rejects Hate."

The fatal white supremacist gathering in Charlottesville and the president's despicable performance in response were still fresh in everyone's mind. Even so, the coalition leadership held that our message had to be positive. That's the common wisdom now, it seems, the PR approach, to keep the "messaging" positive. Mine was the sole voice to say that everyone who came to the demo (on our side) would be there against Trump and against his shameful behavior. Maybe this observation helped bring about the addition of "Nevada Rejects Hate" to our title, the thrust of which, the meeting agreed, had to be that we on the left "Stand with Our Veterans."

Of course, stand with our vets. But following the abuse of soldiers in connection with Vietnam and the conservative backlash, much of the progressive community, in my opinion, has reacted defensively with a kind of knee-jerk honoring of veterans which too often slides over into timidity about questioning the rightness of wars. But I suppose it's a national condition, the rarity of public conversation about our ongoing wars.

At the planning meeting, one of our members who had served in the Navy was tapped to address the protest during a "Veteran Recognition Ceremony."

"So, I guess," I chimed in, "we won't be inviting anyone from Iraq Veterans Against the War to speak." That sally earned a nervous titter and a change of subject. I was being sarcastic, but afterward I thought, that's not a bad idea. A google search turned up no trace of IVAW or VVAW in Reno. Then I thought of someone I used to know during my anti-war days in Chicago and Northwest Indiana, Barry Romo. Through him I got to Jeff Machota, who emailed to say there's no one in Reno on the VVAW roster. So, then I thought, Barry was always a brilliant off-the-cuff speaker, why not ask him to write a short speech for me to read? Barry agreed. It was gratifying that no one in the coalition leadership voiced an objection, quite the contrary, when I circulated my own remarks with Barry's text.

"Hello," I introduced myself to the crowd of 1,000 nonviolent protestors, "my name is Tony Shafton, with Indivisible Northern Nevada. I served in the Army before the Vietnam War, and during that war I was in Vietnam in the Merchant Marine. I'm going to read a statement written for today's event by Barry Romo. Barry was a National Coordinator of Vietnam Veterans Against the War for 40 years. Barry wrote:

'Under the Obama Administration veteran homelessness was cut in half. Trump promised to treat the veterans so much better. But he and his Secretary of Veterans Affairs David Shulkin have done nothing, and are scheming to do even less. They complain that disabled vets are going to bankrupt the country, so they want to privatize the VA and cut back services – this while the military is fighting in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria, not to mention who knows how many other missions! A vet is too often treated like a liar when asking for help, and there is a giant waiting list because they won't hire more staff. 20 to 22 vets kill themselves every day. We need help, not platitudes! We certainly don't need cutbacks. My father and brother were World War II vets, my nephew and I served in Vietnam. I brought my nephew's body back home. We're of proud Mexican heritage. Trump never served in the military and no one in his family has served in our military.'

"Barry Romo wrote this statement," I continued, "before Trump's pronouncements about the Afghanistan War. I'm sure Barry would have something to say about Afghanistan. But I can't speak for him. So, I'll just close with the Vietnam Veterans Against the War motto: Honor the warrior, not the war. Peace."

The motto got applause, which is encouraging.

Anthony Shafton.

I thought about taking my own shot at Trump's Afghanistan program, but decided not to push it. I would have said that looser rules of engagement sound like more civilian casualties; that claiming a share of Afghanistan's wealth supposedly to defray costs is naked imperialism; that additional troops or mercenaries would have to be committed indefinitely as security guards for the mines of American corporations; and that pitting India against Pakistan would stir up a hornets' nest between those two confrontational nuclear powers.

As I made my way through the crowd back to the perimeter to resume marshaling duties in my yellow safety vest, a fair number of veterans in the crowd thanked me for the speech. I passed those thanks along to Barry Romo and VVAW.

ANTHONY SHAFTON IS AN AUTHOR WHO LIVES IN RENO, NEVADA. HIS FORTHCOMING BOOK IS "THE NEVADA THEY KNEW: ROBERT CAPLES AND WALTER VAN TILBURG CLARK."

What is History?

Jack Mallory

I've been thinking a lot about folks' expectations that Ken Burns and Lynn Novick will reveal The Truth about the Vietnam war in their documentary: some kind of complete, objective, evidence-based, and final history of the war. I don't think it's happening. I don't think it ever happens. Ain't no such thing.

I'm not an historian; not someone who, as a profession, collects historical data and turns it into descriptions of what happened in the past, and why. I have taught history, US history, however, for years.

But I am a professional prehistorian, educated as an archaeologist to collect data on the time before history, and turn it into the same kind of descriptions and explanations of the past. Many of the principles of historical and prehistoric study are the same.

"History" has two meanings. The first meaning—what I'll call History—refers to what happened in the past; all of the events that occurred, and the who's, what's, when's, where's and why's involved. History, in that sense, is unchanging, because it's something that has already happened. You can build or tear down all the Confederate statues you want, it has no effect on History in this sense. The Vietnam war is History. What happened can't be changed.

History in this sense is impossible to "see": it's over, it's not happening any more. Historians don't observe History, the way a chemist can observe a chemical reaction. We can only look for what's left after the events, and try to infer what the events were.

But the second meaning, history referring to the study of the past, or what I'll call Hs (History as a study), is the attempt to know and explain what happened in the past—Hs is the study of History, if that's not too confusing. Hs is like coming into the chemist's lab, trying to figure out what he/she was doing from the chemicals, flasks, burners, etc. that are left behind. (I'm not a chemist, give me a fucking break, here.)

Hs does change, with new historians, new facts about the past, new ideas about how to explain the past and how the past is relevant to the present. What we think about History will change, as will our interpretation of how and why it's relevant to the present.

Even if we only look at Hs being done at a single period in time, we may find a variety of different versions of history. They may vary in the degree of their accuracy in descriptions and explanations of what happened in the past—some may come very close to what REALLY happened and why, others may not. The difficulty, obviously, is figuring out which Hs is most correct.

What happened and why a long time ago can be very difficult to determine — evidence can be sparse, hard to find, hard to interpret. What happened and why recently can also be difficult to determine—because there can be so damned MUCH evidence. This plethora of evidence requires a determination (often subjective) of what's more and less important; this plethora of evidence is often contradictory, again requiring a subjective determination of what is "good" vs. less good or bad evidence.

In my own field, the study of Maya prehistory, nothing about what the Maya actually did thousands of years ago, or the reasons why, can change. But our understanding of Maya prehistory has changed. Archaeologists once studied the Maya (did Maya Hs) with a focus on what they thought were Maya priest kings. Because the most obvious artifacts were the huge stelae depicting individuals with ornate costumes and jewelry, these were the obvious things to study, along with the palaces and temples around them. It was assumed that, to understand the Maya, you collected information on the rich and famous, assuming that understanding them would explain why Maya culture was as it was.

As archaeological techniques improved, and with changes in theories about why cultures take the form they do, the archaeological focus changed to an examination of Maya lower class life, how they made a living, what people ate, what tools they used, how they produced food and tools, the environment they lived in. This information was believed to be as, or more, important than the information about the ruling elite. The assumption was that societies take the form they do because of their organization to produce the necessities of life. Maya Hs changed, and so did our conclusions about Maya History. Thank you, Karl Marx.

Similarly, while the History of the United States can't be changed, Hs has changed repeatedly over the years. I'm not, as a I said, an historian; I won't go into detail here. But it's certainly the case that US Hs once focused on presidents, generals, and leaders of industry. Explanations involved looking at their letters, diaries, speeches, and writings, with the assumption that these things explained why we were the way we were, why we became what we did. The ideas of the rich and famous were the explanatory factors under study. In many cases, we knew very well what members of this segment of society did and said and wrote—our information was correct, although our explanations may not have been.

That, too, has changed. Hs now looks at a much wider range of US History, with different kinds of Hs techniques and assumptions, producing very different descriptions and explanations of what happened in the past.

And I'm not even going into the differences in Hs that depend on audience and medium, because this isn't something I understand well. But the Hs one produces for a text aimed at elementary school students is very different from what goes into a popular book, or TV series, aimed at adults.

The Burns/Novick series is one kind of Hs. It describes the History of the Vietnam war based on the assumption of its authors, the data that they choose to use, their intent and target in writing it. It will not be The Truth about the Vietnam war. It will be one version of the small-t truth; other versions have already been produced, and will come in the years, decades, perhaps centuries to come (see Jonathan Shay's look at what happened during the Trojan War, 2000+ years after it occurred, and what it means to the present).

Big T Truths only come from god, if you believe in god. If that source of revelation doesn't work for you, you're stuck with human beings, writing and re-writing history as Hs again and again. If you desperately want to know what "REALLY" happened in the past and why, and religious texts aren't acceptable descriptions of History, you're going to have to do Hs, and/or read the variety of other people's Hs, and decide for yourself what really happened and why. But, if you do that, keep in mind that your conclusions are your own, not universal truths that everyone should, or worse yet must, accept. And they may or may not closely approximate History.

When people assume that there is a big T Truth to be known, and especially when they believe that they KNOW what the Truth is and demand that I accept it, I take the safety off my Browning, if I can steal a useful line from Nazi history.

Oh, and by the way, I really like the Vietnam documentary. As small t truth, of course.

Jack Mallory is a long-time VVAW member.

Vietnam Memories

Dan New

"I bet you still hate Jane Fonda, don't you?" For just a moment, I thought about my friend's question. Then, I said, "That was 45 years ago. I was just a kid and so was she." I sensed his need for a snarl of agreement, the expected veteran's response, the stereotype. He turned back to the conversation with my other friends about the PBS documentary, "The Vietnam War." My apprehension heightened. Images in my psyche become a little less frozen and the reels of remembrances begin to roll forward when prompted by the trailers for the film.

It's been hard work over the years to come to terms with the war, with the ideologies, the ravages, my service and my memories. What remains till this day are the flashbacks, the sleepless nights, the survivor's guilt and my love of this country. I've accepted that all of it is in my DNA.

When I returned to Vietnam on a reconciliation journey in 2015, we walked not only through the battle sights but through the temples and pagodas of worship. I recall the Buddhist monks' chanting on Lady Black Mountain after a fellow veteran had purged his pain from the battles there in 1968. We practiced the tools that cope with combat related stress as part of daily life, meditation, prayer, mindfulness, breathing, the list goes on.

A few weeks from now, we'll live through it all again. Our collective emotions will be stirred when viewing the Ken Burns and Lynn Novick documentary, "The Vietnam War," including myself and others who served, protesters, draft resisters, ex-patriots, the Vietnamese (north and south), the Viet Cong, the bearers of Agent Orange-caused diseases, the Gold Star mothers, the siblings, and the children of those who lost their lives both during and after the war. It's a long list, a tragic list, but a common one to all wars.

I know that some of the program will trigger responses in me. But I'm sure that I will not be alone. Countless others across our nation will find themselves reacting to the images and events from 50 years ago. I say that because I can experience a flashback when I walk a street and smell diesel fumes or hear the approach of a helicopter's rotating blades or cringe during the fireworks on July 4th. A few new generations will have their first viewing of the war that folks at home viewed on our televisions in the 60s and 70s. We will need to answer their questions from who we are now, all these years later.

In my mind, Mr. Burns and Ms. Novick offer us an opportunity to respond in a kinder way than was the case back then. There will be Monday morning discussions, dinner table chats, and friends joining in conversation as the war is rolled out on our flat screens. We have the chance to relive it, and from a perspective that speaks from wisdom, grace and understanding.

We live in difficult times now. There is little room for hate. Jane Fonda has lived her life, moved on and lives with her regrets as we all need to try to do. In a *Vanity Fair* article from January 2015 by Joanna Robinson, Ms. Fonda stated, "Whenever possible I try to sit down with vets and talk with them... it makes me sad... it will to my grave that I made a huge, huge mistake..."

My regret is the self-imposed silence that I endure when I permit others to imply a cliché over my truth without objection. It started when I returned, when few would listen.

Dan New is a Vietnam Veteran who served in the US Army 1967-68.

Support for Nazis is Not New to America

John Ketwig

Recent events in Charlottesville, Virginia have focused attention upon neo-Nazis, Fascists, and white supremacists, almost as if these groups are a new presence in America's political landscape. The history of the Nazi influence upon our institutions is very troubling, as Nazi sympathizers have quietly influenced American big business and political power for some time. Today, in the time of Trump, those activities are enjoying a resurgence, marching without hoods or masks and openly spreading their venomous messages of hate, intolerance, and violence. While monuments tumble and politicians dance over "fake" facts, few seem to remember that in the early 1930s a group of powerful businessmen and political leaders plotted a coup d'état to overthrow the FDR administration and replace it with a totalitarian Fascist government aligned with Italy's Mussolini and Germany's Hitler. They very nearly succeeded. The roots of today's turmoil run deep.

The "roaring twenties" came to an abrupt halt in October 1929, when the stock market crashed. By 1932, over 17 million Americans were unemployed, and most of the banks had closed. The Great Depression ravaged the nation. Desperate for a change, America elected Franklin Delano Roosevelt president at the end of 1932, and FDR set about creating a "New Deal" of reforms that would put Americans back to work, and stimulate the economy. Bold programs such as the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), and the Works Progress Administration (WPA) resulted in massive employment gains. The revolutionary National Industrial Act of 1933 guaranteed workers "the right to organize and bargain collectively through representatives of their own choosing," without "interference, restraint, or coercion from employers." Not without struggle and bloodshed, a significant portion of American labor became unionized.

In 1934, still in the early days of the Roosevelt administration, a number of prominent industrialists and businessmen were outraged by government's pressure to take some responsibility for the welfare of their employees. The New Deal was referred to as the "Jew Deal" and Roosevelt was called a "communist." The Bolshevik "revolt of the masses" in Russia was viewed as a dire threat by these capitalists, but they found inspiration in the economic recoveries taking place in Mussolini's Fascist Italy and Hitler's Nazi Germany. Both were harsh totalitarian regimes with little regard for individuals, and no patience for opponents.

Soon after Roosevelt was inaugurated in 1933, a group of these American industrialists and businessmen formed the American Liberty League. Led by Irenee Du Pont and J.P. Morgan, Jr. the members praised Mussolini for the "sound ideas" that guided him in governing Italy, and Hitler for the bold "leadership" that he showed in overwhelming opposition groups such as Jews in Germany. The American Liberty League boasted such members as the leaders of General Motors, Standard Oil, Chase National Bank, Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company, General Motors, Ford Motor Company, a string of J.P. Morgan's banks, Bethlehem Steel, US Steel, Sun Oil, Pittsburgh Plate Glass, as well as a wide range of other Wall Street executives and political powers, most notably FDR's political rival Alf Smith, retailer J.C. Penney, and Wall Street executive and former US Senator Preston Bush, the father of future President George H. W. Bush and grandfather of "W." Most of the plotters enjoyed lucrative dealings with the Fascist governments in Germany and Italy.

Support for the Fascists was widespread in America's business hierarchy. Henry Ford was an avid admirer of Hitler. Ford's intensely anti-Semitic 1927 book, "The International Jew," was a model for Hitler's Mein Kampf, and the Fuhrer kept a portrait of Ford over his desk throughout his career. Famed aviator Charles Lindbergh was an outspoken Nazi supporter. Fred C. Koch, father of today's "Koch Brothers" Charles G. and David H., built a large oil refinery for the Nazi war machine and continued to do business with the Nazis throughout World War II.

Outraged by FDR's proposals to reinforce America's workers, the American Liberty League quietly planned a coup d'état to overthrow America's democratic government and install a Fascist dictatorship in America. The plotters planned to mobilize 500,000 of the nation's disgruntled World War I veterans and arm them with an equal number of rifles from Du Pont's Remington Arms Company. The plot was well-funded and came near to being implemented, but they made the mistake of offering the Dictator's position (modeled upon Hitler's Fuhrer position in Germany) to General Smedley Butler, the former head of the Marine Corps and a genuine hero to whom Congress had awarded two Medals of Honor. Smedley Butler is widely recognized among anti-war people for his "War is a Racket" booklet. Butler was not party to an armed overthrow of the democratic government of the United States, and he informed Roosevelt of the plan. The plot was investigated and verified by Congress, but none of the conspirators was ever interviewed or prosecuted, and few newspapers mentioned the affair. This most alarming incident was systematically played down, and it is rarely mentioned in history books.

During World War II, many big American corporations continued doing business with the Nazis without any interruption. Both Ford and General Motors supplied vehicles to the Nazis, and none of their shipments to and from Germany were ever torpedoed in the North Atlantic. The heads of both companies were awarded the Grand Cross of the German Eagle medal, Nazi Germany's highest civilian honor. After the war, both GM and Ford collected tens of millions of dollars from America in the form of "war reparations" for damages suffered by their factories in Germany during the hostilities. GM supplied state-of-the-art jet propulsion systems to the Luftwaffe, enabling the Messerschmidt ME-262 to be the first jet fighter used in combat. The ME-262 was more than 100 miles per hour faster than America's P-51 Mustang, and GM did not share its jet engine technology with the American military until after the end of the war. In similar fashion, GM and Exxon shared technologies with Germany's I.GFarben company to produce synthetic gasoline for the Nazis, but not for the allies. I.G. Farben also produced the gas capsules used in the "Final Solution" gas chambers. Du Pont and Standard Oil New Jersey maintained production plants in Germany to produce synthetic lubricants. Alcoa Aluminum supplied unlimited quantities of the vital metal to the Nazis, but aluminum was in very short supply to America's war effort. Chase Manhattan Bank laundered much of the wealth seized from Jewish business accounts throughout Europe, with the assistance of the Sullivan and Cromwell law firm operated by American brothers Allen and John Foster Dulles. IBM supplied accounting machinery that allowed the Nazis to sort large volumes of information quickly and efficiently, enabling the Germans to identify, track, sort, and systematically eliminate millions of Jews, Gypsies, homosexuals, and other "undesirables" from the population, and within the death camps.

In 1937, America's ambassador to Germany remarked: "A clique of US industrialists is hell-bent to bring a Fascist state to supplant our democratic government and is working closely with the Fascist regimes in Germany and Italy."

History would, of course, move on. As pointed out by the Occupy movement, today's corporate capitalists are dead set against providing any benefits or respect to American labor. Income inequality has mushroomed in recent years. Since the Reagan administration, the federal government has worked tirelessly to eliminate or diminish the power of unions. The Supreme Court's 2010 Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission decision ruled that it is OK for corporations and labor unions to spend as much as they want to support or denounce individual candidates in elections. Look carefully, and you will find that today many of America's top industrialists and businessmen still quietly espouse Fascist models of totalitarian government and the complete subjugation of labor. They do not carry torches or march in Charlottesville, only because they don't have to. Their clever machinations behind the scenes have created immense wealth for themselves, but wages for labor have remained static, and benefits have been cut to the bone. Readers may remember antique notions such as company-supplied health care plans, the 40-hour work week, pensions and retirement plans. Our children and grandchildren will never know those concepts.

Charlottesville showed that the Fascists have sold their evil theories to a surprisingly active and vocal segment of the American public. Who would have imagined a crowd of Americans carrying Nazi swastika flags and chanting "Heil Trump" on the campus designed by Thomas Jefferson? There is ample cause for the American public to be alarmed. We can only hope it's not too late.

John Ketwig is a lifetime member of VVAW, and the author of "...and a hard rain fell: A G.I.'s True Story of the War in Vietnam."

NAZI PARTY MEMBERS TRY TO FIGHT OFF AN ATTACK BY VIETNAM VETERANS AGAINST THE WAR

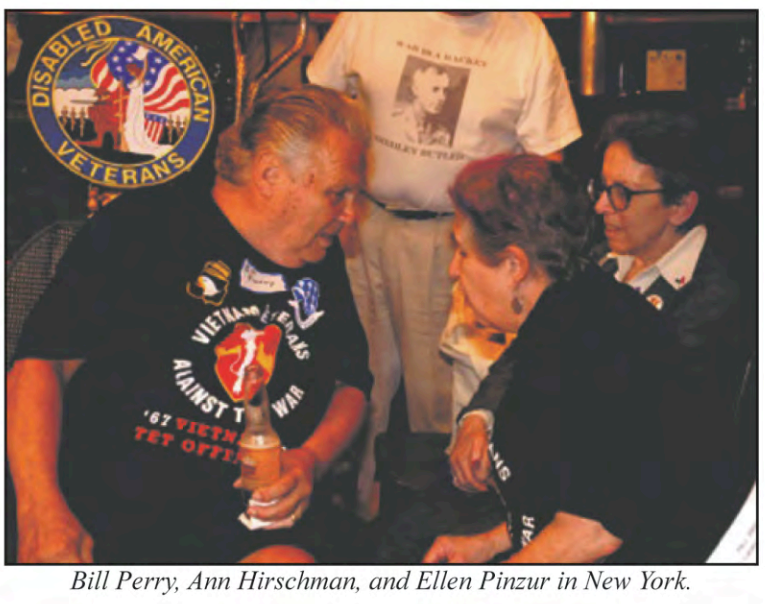
Confrontation could have been serious, but ended with only one man slightly injured

—AP Photo

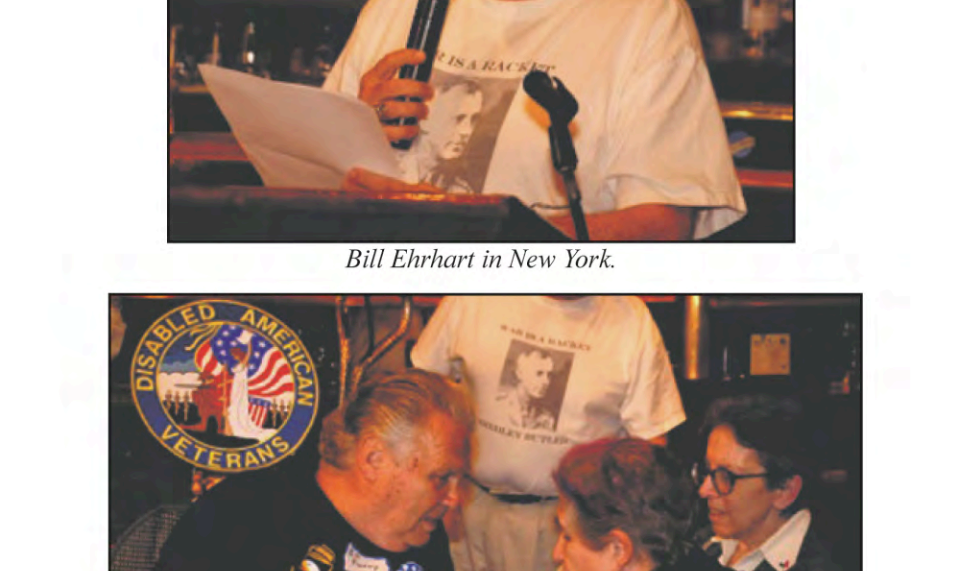
VVAW 50th Gatherings

Brian Matarrese and Susan Schnall in New York.

Bill Ehrhart in New York.



Bill Perry, Ann Hirschman, and Ellen Pinzur in New York.



In Recognition
Presented to
Vietnam Veterans Against the War
VIETNAM VETERANS AGAINST THE WAR
by Veterans For Peace
In honor of the groundbreaking efforts of Vietnam Veterans Against the War and its members, who established a foundation of veterans' resistance to war setting an example of excellence for other veterans to follow.
Veterans For Peace Salutes
VVAW's 50 Years of Resistance to War!

Joe Miller and Dave Kettenhofen in Milwaukee.

John Zutz and Billy Curmano in Milwaukee.

Muriel Hogan and Sukie Wachtendonk in Milwaukee.

Ann Hirschman and Barry Romo in Milwaukee.

Jim and Sukie Wachtendonk in Milwaukee.

Jan Barry at Connolly's in New York.

THE VETERAN
SECTION B
Volume 47, Number 2 Fall 2017

Remembering Chukia Lawton

MARK HARTFORD

It is time once again to celebrate the life of a freedom fighter, a sister, our old friend... Chukia Lawton has died.

"Women hold up half of the sky". This sentence clarifies how important women are to the successes in our society and our world. It also describes the impact Chukia Lawton had on me, those around me and those we were fighting for the poor and oppressed people of our community. Our efforts to unite people in the defense of Gary Lawton, himself a freedom fighter who was falsely accused of killing two white policemen in his hometown of Riverside, in southern California on April 2, 1971 was my introduction to Chukia Lawton.

In 1971, the San Bernardino VVAW chapter helped found the Riverside Political Prisoners Defense Committee during a meeting with Chukia and others from in and around Riverside and San Bernardino. The committee developed into a multicultural, multi-organizational planning group providing support for the legal defense and community support of Gary and the other two defendants.

Riverside police officers Christian and Teel were killed by unknown assailants in an ambush at the edge of Riverside's East Side primarily Black community. Before they died they radioed for help, and within minutes an army of police besieged the black community. Heavily armed, totally disorganized and in a state of near panic, they stopped, searched and terrorized anyone who was unfortunate enough to be in the area.

Some of the police in Riverside used the murders that night as an excuse to vent their panic, frustrations and racist hatred against blacks throughout the East Side. One in particular, Ronald Lund, a proven racist, used this as an opportunity to "get" Gary Lawton for these crimes. Lund's testimony was to be critical to the prosecution's case against Gary and also critical to the understanding of his racist attitudes towards people of color

The only evidence presented at the trial that proved to be truthful was Gary and Chukia's history as black "militants and trouble makers." This included their community organizing activities in 1968 to have a park named in memory of Dr. Martin Luther King after his assassination; and leadership in a citizen's police complaint council established to investigate and mediate police brutality complaints within the black community — an idea vehemently opposed by the Riverside Police Department.

Gary and Chukia helped found the Black Congress, a multiracial group that dealt with problems facing communities of color. Activities of the Congress included boycotting stores that inflated prices in the black community while refusing to hire from within the community; development of safe, affordable low-income housing; a protest led by Chukia of black nurses of racist practices by the administration of a local hospital; and continued complaints about police brutality. Thirty years before Black Lives Matter, Chukia, Gary and others in their community were standing in defense of those in the African American community killed and brutalized by racist police.

Gary and Chukia also organized aid for some in the community flooded out of their homes in 1969, finding them homes, furniture and provisions. By early 1971, Gary and Chukia and the Black Congress were involved in the defense of William Palmer, a black man shot in the back as he walked away from the police. The police had charged Palmer with resisting arrest.

It was this history as an activist that led to Gary's arrest for the murder of these two police officers in early 1971. In the beginning Gary, Larrie Gardner, a street kid, and Nehemiah Jackson, a bible study student, were arrested and charged with two counts of murder and conspiracy (easier to prove). They were held without bail from early 1971 to their release from jail at the end of their first trial in 1973. In the first trial, all of the prosecution's witnesses except Officer Lund testified that their earlier testimony before the grand jury was false. They testified that they lied because the police had terrorized them. The trial ended in a hung jury with nine for acquittal and three for conviction. As the trial ended many on the jury hugged Gary and wished him well on the day the trial ended.

These three men spent two years in jail without a right to see their friends and children. Chukia was the only person allowed to visit Gary, and only through bars that denied them physical contact. After bail was finally set, VVAW called on activists from around the country to help raise the necessary $50,000 per person, and we were able to get all three released from jail.

The second trial occurred in Riverside — where the murders had taken place. Although the local media had found the three guilty the prosecutor gave up on Nehemiah Jackson, the Bible student, and sent him home, dropping the charges against him. Gary and Larrie, black militant and street kid, would be tried together. Unfortunately for the prosecution, all of their witness continued to tell the truth — Gary and Larrie had nothing to do with the murders. It ended in a hung jury with eight for guilty and four for acquittal. It was now 1974.

For the first time in California's legal history, a man (Gary — Larrie had been dropped from the case, and it was back to where it had begun, an attack on a black "militant") was tried a third time for a crime of which he had never been convicted. It was now 1975. The third trial was to be held in Riverside again but because of a police shooting in the courthouse at the start of the trial, it was moved to Los Angeles. For the first time, the jury included people of color. The jury was out less than an hour and found Gary innocent of all charges. Shortly after, Gary and Chukia moved their family to northern California because of the fear the children, now in their teens, would be targeted by the racist police still in the Riverside PD.

These events have to be understood to understand Chukia Lawton. She was a person guided by great feelings of love in spite of everything happening to her and her family: Love for her community, love for the most oppressed in our society but most of all love of her family and her husband. While she was still allowed to work, Chukia took care of her job and her two children and still found time to work on the Defense Committee. She was often heard telling people she met for the first time who expressed their sympathy for her and her husband that she appreciated it but didn't need sympathy — she had an abundance of that — what she needed was hard work, money and anything else they could offer to help save the life of her husband and other political prisoners. She had little patience with those who turned away from the struggle, yet had an abundance of patience for the failings of others and always a warm smile for all of us during a sometimes very dangerous struggle.

I spent most of every waking day for two years with this beautiful woman. We traveled all over California speaking to people about Gary and raising money for the defense committee to pay legal fees. She never hesitated, she never faltered. She kept her commitment to her husband long after most would have given up. Theirs was truly a love story of two amazing people committed to each other and their children.

Chukia, 1974.

But the love story was larger than just her family. She was always ready to comfort one of us afraid to go on. Many other members of the committee were harassed, followed, stopped for no reason by the police, fired from their jobs or warned not to continue with these activities. She counseled, fought back and stood up for us through this long period of struggle.

My wife spent many days and nights caring for our five year old son alone during this time because of my travels. Many people sacrificed much more. But Chukia, and after his release Gary, were always there when needed. My daughter was born in 1973. The day after her birth, Gary and Chukia turned up at the hospital to congratulate us on the birth of our daughter, kisses all around for mom, passing the baby back and forth throughout the visit. Later that night I sat in Gary and Chukia's kitchen drinking beers, celebrating the birth of the youngest member of the Defense Committee!

I will always honor and remember this fearless freedom fighter and friend. She loved as well or better than anyone I have ever known. She fought harder than anyone I have ever known. She was my battle buddy. She was a friend who remembered me on Veteran's Day each year with a call to remind me how much she loved and honored me and everyone in VVAW.

I was able to speak with her the day before she died. I asked her how she was feeling? She responded, "Great! How else can I feel with so many wonderful friends"? RIP sister.

Chukia Lawton and Barry Romo, 2009.

MARK HARTFORD, US ARMY, 1966-1969, 2ND INFANTRY, DMZ KOREA, 1966-67, VVAW CALIFORNIA 1971.

Horace Coleman: May 4, 1943-September 16, 2017

The Coleman Family

Horace Wendell Coleman, Jr., was born and grew up in Dayton, Ohio, the home of the poet Paul Laurence Dunbar. He was the oldest son of Roberta (MacGregor) and Horace Wendell Coleman, Sr., a World War II Navy veteran.

Of himself, Horace said he was the kid who read books with a flashlight under the covers after dutifully turning off the lights. Perhaps these were the early years of both his literary thirst and his resistance.

After graduating from Dunbar High School, Horace enrolled at Bowling Green State University of Ohio, majoring in English and participating in the Reserved Officers Training Corps (ROTC). He was initiated into Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity, Epsilon Theta chapter, and is remembered by his brothers as one who mesmerized with his "intellect and savoir faire." While attending BGSU, Horace was also a reporter and photographer for *The BG News* campus newspaper and held an internship with the *Dayton Daily News*. He earned the Bachelor of Arts Degree in English in 1965.

Following graduation, Horace was commissioned into the United States Air Force as a Second Lieutenant. After assignments in Panama City, Florida, and at Shaw Air Force Base, South Carolina, he left for Ca Mau, Vietnam in February 1967.

In Ca Mau

In Ca Mau the women
sweep the canal with their oars
on the way to the floating fruit
market
bananas
pineapples
grapelets with husks stacked in
slender sampans

The Americans in Ca Mau eat
tin-skinned food
play prostitute roulette
clap
syph
rigid love with rifles under the
bed

The people race bicycles on
Sundays
children play soccer on the
parade ground
pigs walk the streets alone but
GIs ride 6 to a fast jeep

In the forest of U Minh
500 pound bombs fall 5 miles
and shake the yellow palm-
thatched huts
and the yellowed stucco houses
and the yellow tent O Club in Ca
Mau

Soldiers hunt communist water
buffalo
with quad .50s and infra-red
they scream howitzers at
suspicious rice
but one bullet
makes a helicopter a shotgunned
duck
one rocket trips the man- blind
radar
off its legs and the Americans
leave
and the women sweep after them.

In a few months, he was transferred to Saigon where his duties as an intercept director/air traffic controller continued. He was officially credited with ninety-nine saves of aircraft and crews and was awarded the Bronze Star Medal for meritorious service

His tour of duty in Vietnam ended in February, 1968, when he flew out in the midst of the Tet offensive. Back stateside, he held assignments at Topsham AFS, Maine, Richards-Gebaur AFB, Missouri, and Fort Lee, Virginia.

Captain Horace W. Coleman was honorably discharged in June, 1970.

Having committed to a writing career, he was accepted into the inaugural (Fall 1970) Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing program at Bowling Green State University, under the mentorship of Dr. Frederick Eckman. Horace arrived back in Ohio just a few weeks following the Kent State shootings which occurred on his birthday. Profoundly affected by his experiences in Vietnam, his passionate portrayals of the war's ramifications addressed every aspect of the conflict.

Still Life with Dead Hippie
Kent State, May 4, 1970

It's all in the point of view.
Suppose you have your
sophored out sophomore
slumped on the sidewalk
in the foreground.
Never made it to the bar.
His buddy's embarrassed
& his girl's outraged.
No fun tonight, Hon!

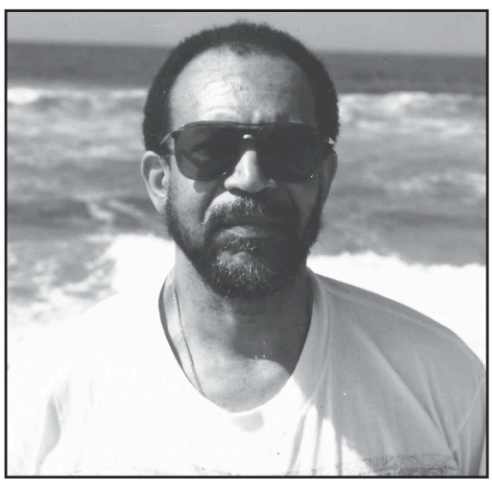
Or, maybe there's this
feminist witch exercising
her anger on this
newly stricken MCP
while the stunned bastard
in bell bottoms looks for reasons.

It could be a pink- faced VC broad
trying to grasp the life that's
just flown from your
unfavorite dumb son. And
she has no right to cry out
in plain sight, to be so
full of pain. You have to
blame her for
the cluck's bad luck.

Of course what it was,
was these dirty, rotten,
vicious whore kids—
standing around watching
the overarmed, undertrained
National Guard about to go wild.

And yeah, those kids were fools
some of them, believing in
democracy
and free speech and other book stuff
as if it belonged in the real world
Out there chuking rocks & slogans
& curses.
Full of dope, sex, & unAmerican
antiwar ideas. They were coming
out of class,out of their stupor
sitting on & smoking grass.
Reminding *you* that
something's wrong & someone has
to do something. So, it's *their* fault
that it's not their fault.

Then we all find out
there were no snipers
or syphilitic commie call girl
recruiting on campus &
that girls was just
a terrified runaway barley
old enough to bleed but
just the right age to
understand the deed.



And did you ever notice
how that cheap statue
down there in Columbus
of the used car salesman
toting those forged registrations
past the Capitol building
looks just like Governor Rhodes?

Horace received his MFA degree from Bowling Green State University in 1972 and began a career of writing, teaching, commentary, and active pursuit of peace and justice.

What could Horace Coleman not do? Teacher, poet, essayist, technical writer. A faculty member at universities from Ohio to California. An Artist in the Schools residency where he taught young students his art. Public Information Officer for the Ohio Department of Health. Proposal writer, technical writer, and editor in the private sector. Writer for the Ohio Arts Council. Marketing and Sales Process Specialist at McDonnell Douglas/Boeing. He was awarded an Individual Arts Grant by the Ohio Arts Council and a Senior Fellowship at the Fine Arts Work Center, Provincetown, Massachusetts.

And he continued writing, always through the unwavering, unfiltered eyes of the veteran, especially the black veteran.

A Downed Black Pilot
Learns How to Fly

"Now that the war is over,
we'll have to go back
to killing each other.
But, I'll send my medals to Hanoi
and let them make bullets
if they'll ship my leg back.
And, if they mail me an ash tray
made from my F4C,
they can keep the napalm as a
bonus.
Next time I'll wait and see
if they've declared war on me –
or just America."

A single-spaced bibliography of Horace's publications—poems, essays, reviews, commentary—would itself fill pages. In addition to his two collections of poetry, *Between a Rock and a Hard Place* and *In the Grass*, published by Vietnam Generation, Inc. & Burning Cities Press, his work appears in newspapers, journals, textbooks, on-line publications, anthologies (including *Carrying the Darkness* edited by W.D. Ehrhart).

Ehrhart writes that Coleman: "better than any other Vietnam War poet, presents in his 'OK Corral East/Brothers in the Nam' poems the ironic juxtaposition of the American Frontier and the black American's newly enraged consciousness. Using an allusive compression unusual in Vietnam War poems, Coleman portrays accurately and ominously the black/white confrontation that pervaded the '60s, showing that this war within the war may have transcended the obvious shooting hostilities. Black/white imagery controls many of his poems. [*W.D. Ehrhart, Unaccustomed Mercy: Soldier-Poets of the Vietnam War*, Texas Tech University Press, 1989]"

Horace wrote numerous articles for, and was committed to the work of, Veterans for Peace, and Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW). He was a regional contact person for both organizations and a lifetime member of VVAW.

Notes for the
Veteran's War Protest

Ralph: concerning plans for the local march, the following:

1. Saw the weary demonstration in Washington, the burning faces of our sad boy warriors throwing their medals at the president.

2. Think we should emulate but not copy, so: when the delegation arrives at the state capitol first read the petition:

"We are not afraid to kill. We are sorry we murdered our souls. We did as told but we learned how to say NO! Stop it. Or we will stop you. Don't resist. You can't stop the ghosts you made of us."

3. Next, have those who lost legs crawl forward and neatly stack them. Then bowl the skull of your best killed buddy down the aisle.

4. Finally, have the blind push the quadruplegics forward They will have knives in their teeth to give to the legislators to use on themselves. We leave. If they don't use them we come back.

Horace

PS. Save the instructions for your grandkids. They'll come in handy.—hc

Of himself, Horace Coleman wrote, "[I have] survived two marriages, a major illness, a car wreck, and the current sorry state of humanity and the economy."

He is survived by two daughters, Brooke Danielle Coleman and Akeiisa Elizabeth Coleman; one son, Drake Anthony Coleman; a sister, Lynette Coleman; brother, MacGregor Coleman, his former wives, Gwendolyn Rosemond and Charlaine Vitarelli, and an extended family of cousins, friends, and writers.

Contributions can be made in the name of Horace W. Coleman, Jr., to:

Veterans for Peace
c/o Pat Alviso
775 Havana Avenue
Long Beach, CA 90804-4450

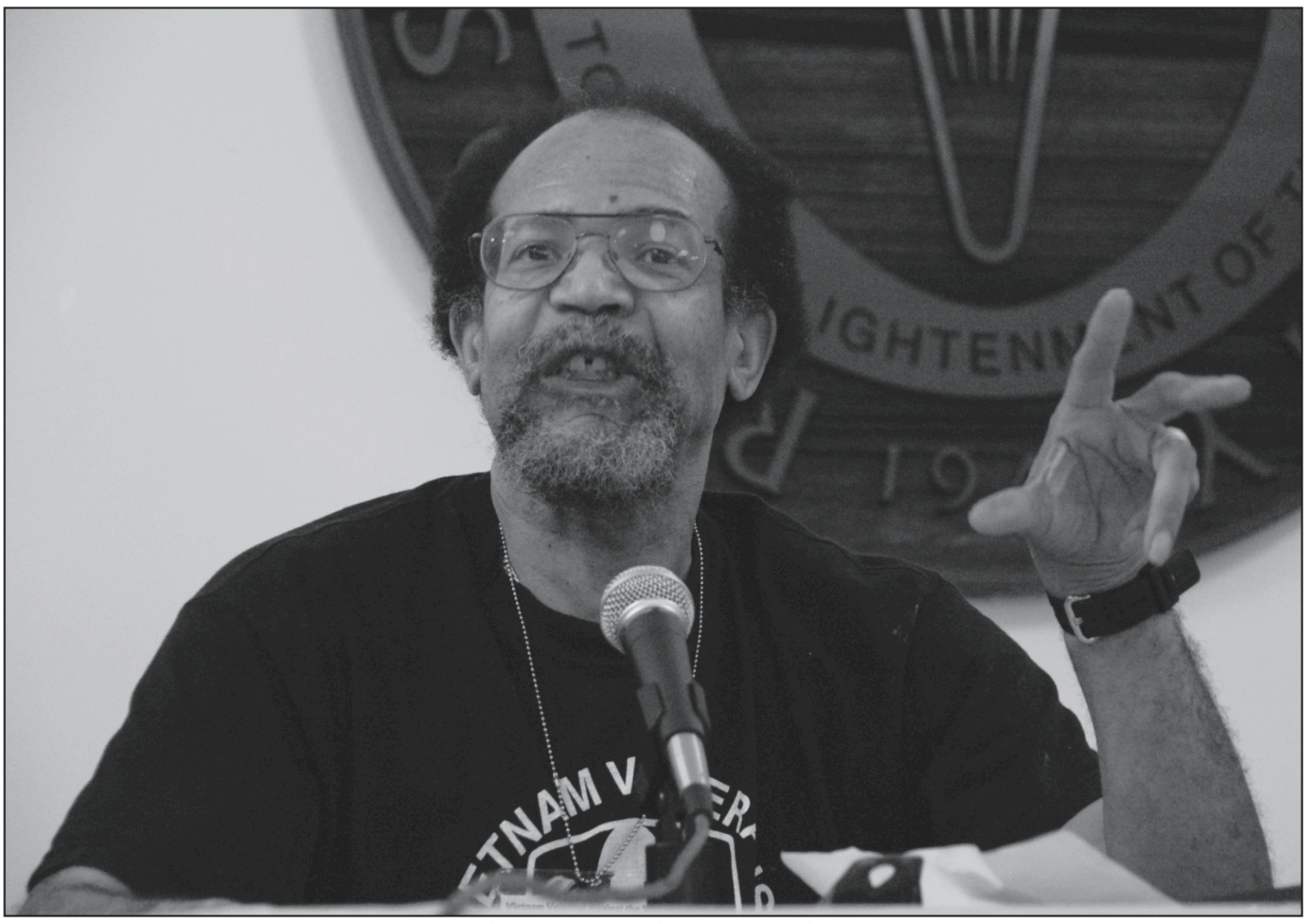
and/or
Vietnam Veterans Against the War
www.vvaw.org
(Option for on-line
or mail-in donation)

In Memory of Horace Coleman

W. D. Ehrhart

I am deeply saddened by the news that Horace Coleman has died, though it doesn't come as a surprise. I had known he was in poor health for some time. I only ever met Horace twice: a long time ago when a group of us veteran-poets read in New York City—I think it was at the Public Theatre in the early 1980s, and again at the VVAW 40th Anniversary in Chicago—but I've known of him and been in touch with him since 1975 when Jan Barry and I were compiling *Demilitarized Zones: Veterans After Vietnam*. We used several of Horace's poems in that book. He subsequently published several collections of his own, including *Between a Rock & a Hard Place* and *In the Grass*, and when I was putting together *Carrying the Darkness: the Poetry of the Vietnam War* in 1985, and *Unaccustomed Mercy: Soldier-Poets of the Vietnam War* in 1988, Horace ended up with multiple poems in both books. I am sorry Horace is gone, but I am glad that his voice will continue to be heard through his poetry.

W. D. Ehrhart is a long-time VVAW member, poet, and author.



Horace Coleman at VVAW's 40th Anniversary in Chicago, 2007.

Soul Wounds: Healing and True Peace

Daniel Corral

September marked the third anniversary of Jacob David George's suicide. I never met him personally, but many of my friends who are a part of Iraq Veterans Against the War (IVAW) and Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW) along with the entire anti-war movement both knew and loved him. His life and death touched so many people.

As I listened to Jacob's recorded talk at the First Unitarian Church in April of 2013 during the IVAW testimony: "The Human Cost of War", he described war as causing wounds to soul and body. The Veteran's Administration (VA) had been providing him with cognitive processing therapy, however Jacob insisted on therapy that addressed what he described as moral injury, soul wounds, and soldier's heart.

Jacob stated during his testimony and song that what did help with these wounds of war were things like throwing his medals back in May of 2012 during the NATO meeting in Chicago, along with his work to educate the public and challenge the narrative of war through his bike tour "A Ride Till the End" and other IVAW and anti-war efforts.

This form of therapy was considered "politically loaded" by the VA and therefore could not be considered a part of his treatment plan. During his song, "Soldier's Heart", I was touched by many of his lyrics, especially the ones describing the war in Afghanistan and Iraq as American farmers being sent to kill other farmers. The lyrics described a wounded and shattered man, unable to transition back to civilian life due to the horrors of war: "… I can't have a relationship, can't hold down a job." And a veteran who now lived with a broken heart, a heart broken by the country that he loved and served for.

Just over a year later, Jacob committed suicide. And still the war in Afghanistan and Iraq continues, causing death and trauma.

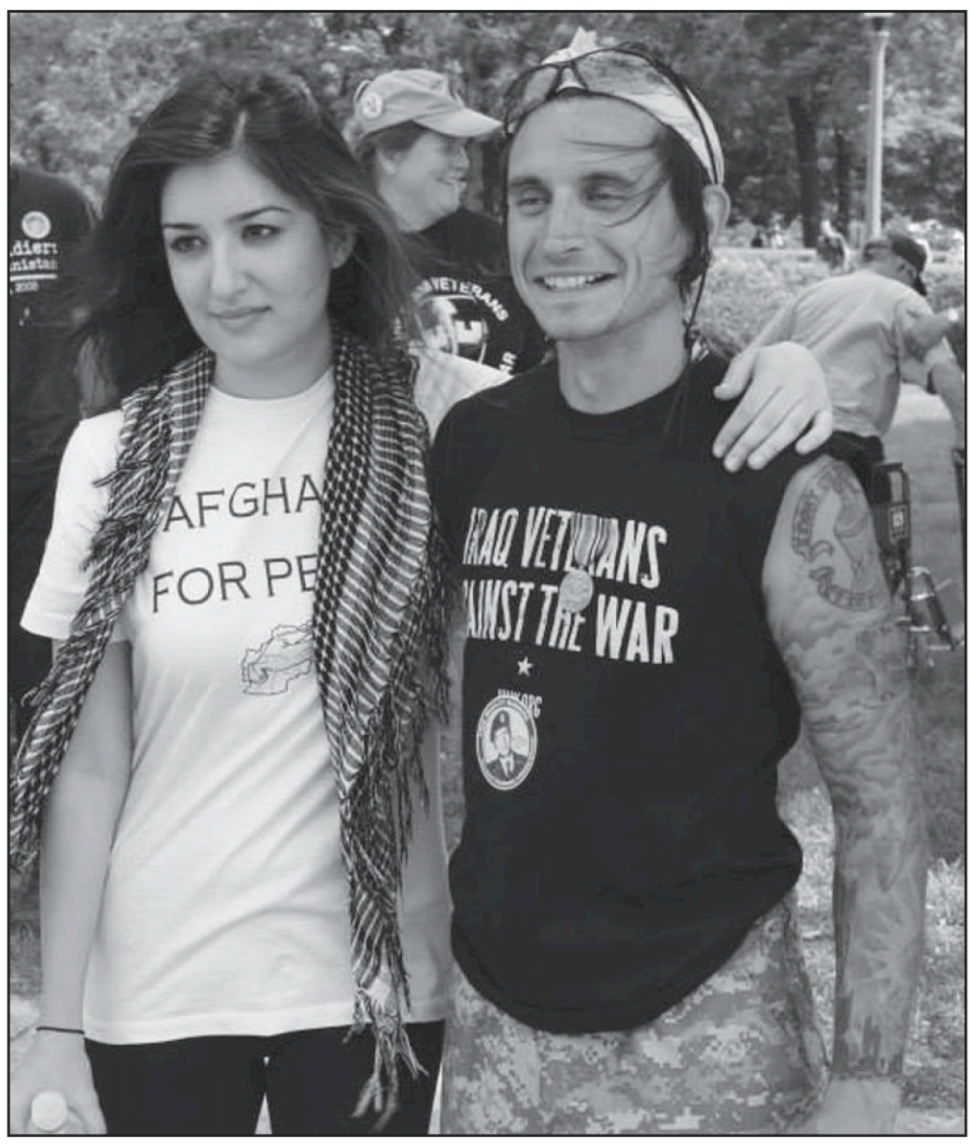
To this day, at least 22 US veterans commit suicide every day. The moral injury, the soul wounds, that Jacob so often talked and sang about, remind me of the life and work of Ignacio Martín-Baró, a priest and social psychologist in El Salvador who was assassinated in 1989.

He had collectively come up with a treatment plan for survivors of the horrors of the civil war in El Salvador, which involved both psychotherapy and what he called social therapy, to address the wounds of war. He stated that trauma was not a disorder, but a self-defense mechanism of the human being against a horrible situation called war. Trauma was a normal response to an abnormal reality. A reality that was anything but real, a horrible nightmare that made no sense, a fantasy.

In November of 2010, I went to the opening of "Operation Exposure: War is Trauma" at the Mess Hall in Chicago, Illinois. It was a "collaboration between the Justseeds Artists' Cooperative and veterans and supporters from Iraq Veterans Against the War (IVAW)… a direct response to the suicide epidemic and violation of GI's right to heal within the GI and veteran community."

The first art print that I noticed was one made by Matt Howard of IVAW which read in part: "PTSD. Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. How is this a disorder? What part of being emotionally and spiritually affected by gross violence is disorder?..." I could not help but make the connections between the people of El Salvador and the people of Afghanistan, Iraq, and the soldiers involved therein.

I believe that Jacob and many



other veterans have been clear about their wounds and their need to heal from what the war has done to their minds, bodies and souls. I believe that Ignacio had it right when he addressed all of these wounds in what he described as psychotherapy and social therapy. An approach that was so effective that it was considered unforgiveable by the Salvadoran and US military, whom subsequently planned and carried out his assassination.

Veterans of US wars have been clear about what their wounds are and what their needs are. From VVAW to IVAW, to the anti-war movement as a whole, the veterans and their allies ought to be listened to and public funds immediately allocated to provide treatment plans that are open to all regardless of discharge, citizenship, etc. Instead of funding more war with our public funds, we can and ought to stop the funding of these wars and instead fund veteran treatment plans and the rebuilding and healing of the people and lands we have and continue to make war in.

We should do this in memory of those affected by war, and who have lived with and shared their wounds and memories, and worked for the healing of lands, minds, bodies, and souls.

Daniel Corral is from Aurora, Illinois. He spends his days caring for his family and building kinship with the world.

Steve Somerstein - Presente!

Ben Chitty

Brother Steve Somerstein died September 19, after a two-year battle with cancer. He leaves a widow, Margaret, and a daughter, Lyla Rose. Many will recall that Steve was a lead organizer and lawyer for the Veterans Peace Convoy to Nicaragua.

Steve had a long career in law, most recently in the Public Defenders office in Brooklyn, New York. Perhaps his most notorious case involved IRA member Joe Doherty as a client. Doherty had been arrested for killing a British Special Air Service member during a 1980 gun battle between SAS and an IRA squad, a few days after the squad had ambushed a Royal Ulster Constabulary detachment. During the 1981 murder trial Doherty escaped and fled to the United States, where he applied for political asylum. Steve and his colleague Mary Pike won the case at every stage until the last stop at the Supreme Court in 1992, where a convoluted and unusual ruling allowed the Attorney General to overrule the Board of Immigration Appeals and cut short Doherty's appeal for asylum.

Steve served in the Marine Corps 1963-1966, and was in the first US combat unit to be deployed to Danang in 1965. He was active in VVAW's Clarence Fitch Chapter for many years, serving on its steering committee, volunteering as a military counselor, and becoming involved in actions around Soviet Afghantsi veterans and the campaign to stop the bombing of Vieques. But the 1988 Convoy and its defiance of the Reagan administration's embargo on Nicaragua was probably his fondest and proudest VVAW moment.More than once he told friends that he truly believed that participating in the Convoy and in VVAW saved his life.

Steve Somerstein - Presente!

Bob Livesey, Steve Somerstein, Leslie on Veterans Peace Convoy to Nicaragua, 1988.

Veterans Peace Convoy to Nicaragua, 1988.

Ben Chitty is a shellback Navy veteran of two deployments to Vietnam, and a long-time member of VVAW.

N. E. Scheppers, Remembered

John Crandell

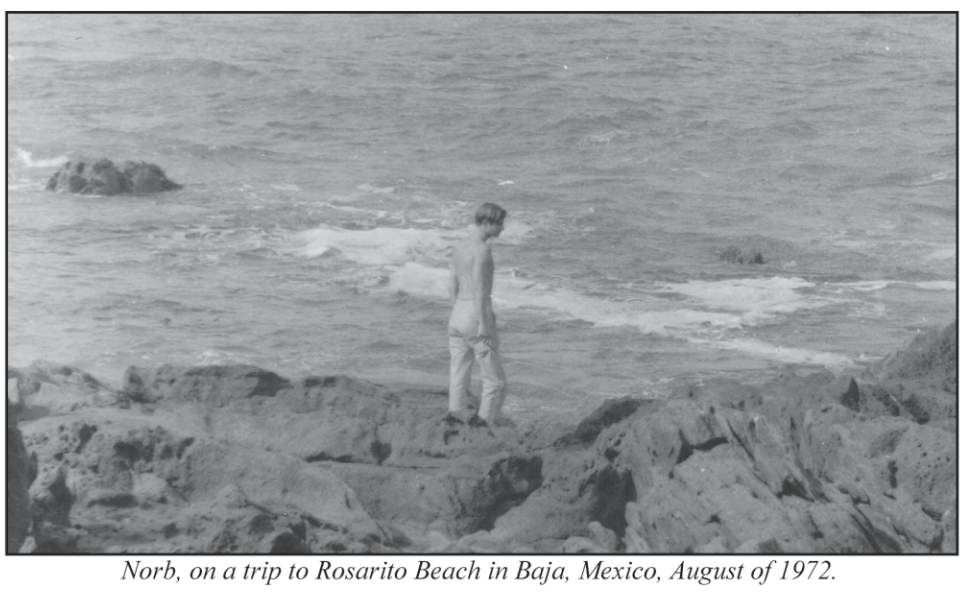
I tried to persuade him to volunteer back when I had, eighteen months earlier in that sordid month of May 1968, the largest monthly draft of the entire war. He could only see doing two years max. I warned him what would happen. And after completing AIT at Ord, he got what I'd feared and ended up on point with the 1st of the 5th of the First Air Cav, got there a week before Christmas of 1969.

I've already written of his stubborn, inordinate performance, featured in the Spring 2015 issue of *The Veteran*. To his credit, it can be added that Norbert Scheppers of Sunland, California did not report on time as ordered, in Oakland, to be bused to Travis Air Force Base for duty in an absurd effort in a foreign land. Instead, all of the discussions we'd had as we had driven back and forth to Valley College seem to have swayed him. After landing in Oakland, he turned around and flew back home to commiserate with his dad, who unfortunately had once been our scout master in the mountains north of L.A. and be persuaded to do his duty to god and country and help prevent the NVA from taking over Rodeo Drive. Norb then reported in to Oakland. I wish now that he'd instead have gone to Canada. He couldn't have stood on moral ground since he'd already passed basic and advanced infantry training.

If he'd have gone north, I'd have followed him after I'd retuned stateside from II Corps in a state of rage, done that instead of a final year at Fort Hood. And then we'd have had very different lives going forward—he without the acrid memory of Vietnam, I and his relations not having to bear witness to a forty-five-year alcoholic suicide.

E-1 Norbert Erwin Scheppers (yes, they kept busting him, kept him on point) hemorrhaged and died late in February 2015. We'd been out of touch since I'd decided to stand up and walk out of a lunch hour reunion, decided to stop witnessing his demise, hearing his Big Rock Candy Dreams (via the easy way, for an effortless quick buck).

In May 1999, I'd scanned a haunting photo of a mortar emplacement atop Mother's Ridge and wired it to him by email. He responded: "How did they get rid of all that dirt from all those thousands of miles of tunnels? Ever slept in water for two weeks, ever pull the fucking leeches off your body twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week? Gee I thought I was running out of blood. Ever not eat for a week? Die for a glass of clean fresh water, ever scared to take a shit because they can smell ya, ever call in an F-4 or artillery? Ever seen shit that ya can't even imagine in all the fucking books in the Library of Congress, ever been a fucking point man with an M-60 that is the only defense and your little one-millionth percent of the unknown and a lot of luck and gee, all I want is a cold beer?"



Norb, on a trip to Rosarito Beach in Baja, Mexico, August of 1972.

In a previous message, he'd mentioned an *L.A. Times* quotation of Hemmingway: "Certainly there is no hunting like the hunting of man, and those who have hunted armed men long enough and like it, never really care for anything else thereafter." I then found and clipped that article, an obituary of a famous Marine Corps sniper.

One learned of his death two years after the fact. One learned that I was the only friend that he'd had in his entire life and one didn't have the slightest idea. I'd needed so much to get out of that small valley where we'd grown up. He never left it. That war killed him as much as his lack of aspiration and his sobering backwardness.

And his being busted surely prevented any serious consideration of the Silver Stars that others in his company had said that he deserved to be honored with. Goodbye, Norb. Adios to all of those peaks and ridges and long dusty trails. I wasn't your constant friend, yet no one could have lived your life for you in the wake of all of that horror. Ave atque vale.

John Crandell is a US Army vet - CONARC, 4th Infantry & 1st Cavalry. He worked afterwards in various jobs in environmental design. Now retired, he is involved in product development and horticultural propagation at 'The Farm' outside of Sacramento, California.

Giong

Larry Craig (reviewer)

Giong by Larry Bramblett
(CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2012)

Giong is translated as beautifully flawed or just plain odd.

Since "Giong" purports to be about me, I will go with beautifully flawed.

The author and I spent six months together at Fort Gordon Georgia. Basic and Advanced infantry. Bramblett fired all the weapons—I was more likely to be off sleeping off a night of reading on the toilet under the one bulb that was left on all night.

From that six month friendship, Larry has managed to turn me into a memorable character. We talked ourselves into a pass to Augusta in real life. In the book I end up at a bar frequented by the evil Colonel's wife and she seduces me. It is all downhill from there.

At the beautiful old French Colonial Continental Hotel he has a lovely blonde nurse from a Swedish hospital ship parked in the Saigon River pick me up. Karen takes me, Craig - just Craig, to an amazing club in the Chinese quarter called Cholon. If you want to know what sex was like back then while flying high on opium, this book is for you.

But, don't get me wrong, there is a lot more to this novel than fine sex and good dope.

After a year of dancing around the five o'clock follies, as the Public Information Office news releases were called, Craig goes back to the states and ends up stationed in Florida. Some CIA hotshot officials hire him to help them steal a shipment of drugs. A Mexican friend that Craig befriended in basic training partners with Craig and they manage to steal $200,000,000 from the CIA criminals and live to celebrate the victory.

You'll find several five star reviews of "Giong" on Amazon where seven used copies are available as well as an audio version for your device.

The editor, Michael Ashenback, calls it an astonishing novel and says it should be read by anyone interested in the challenges faced by veterans of any war.

To get this compelling story told, the reader had to be grabbed early on. The well developed characters certainly did that. I was half way through a Val McDermid when I started "Giong." Each time I sat down to read I had to choose between the two books. I chose "Giong" everytime.

Learn about Buddhism, war and wartime Vietnam culture with this spellbinder.

Larry Craig is from Waupaca WI. He started working with VVAW at the Eugene McCarthy campaign office in Los Angeles in 1967. He testified at the War Crimes Trial in Detroit and was at the rally in DC when the medals were tossed and John Kerry addressed congress.

Why I Support VVAW

Ray O'Loughlin

Every issue shows up in my mailbox with *The Veteran* emblazoned across the top. But I am not a veteran. I did not serve in Vietnam or any other war and have never been in any branch of the military. So why does *The Veteran* from Vietnam Veterans Against the War come to me?

I could say, as some folks do, that, yes, I am a veteran of that era. In a way, I am. But I don't claim that status. In 1968, I gave up my student deferment and applied to my draft board in Cleveland to be classified as a conscientious objector to the war in Vietnam and all wars. They didn't accept my claim and when all appeals were rejected by that board, I was drafted. I refused to go. Though I had resigned myself to spending time in prison, I was never prosecuted for that federal felony. In fact, the overwhelming majority of the thousands who refused were never prosecuted, our act of conscientious refusal many times ending in a bureaucratic stalemate.

Does that make me a veteran? I don't see it that way because I see that status as unique and special. I'm a conscientious objector with a respect for those who have served in the military and gone to war. Oppose the war, not the warrior, as the saying goes.

While I believe that war is never a good idea, I also live in a world that sustains enormous military operations. They are created to go to war and they do. As a realistic idealist, I believe that once a nation asks/demands that its men and women enter harm's way to fight and kill and to suffer lifelong injury and die for you, then you create a sacred obligation surpassing all moral argument. It is an obligation that is an unending responsibility. It's an obligation not satisfied by a hollow "thank you for your service" on national holidays.

The war may be a horrifying moral (or military) catastrophe but that does not lessen society's obligation to support the veterans of that war. Vets are, or should be, entitled to full health care without question whether from the effects of Agent Orange or traumatic brain injury. They are, or should be, entitled to numerous benefits and supports to help them move back into non-military life. To see homeless vets begging on the street is a national embarrassment. To abandon a generation of vets to health problems and drug addiction—as the US did to Vietnam-era vets—is a disgrace and a crime.

So, I support VVAW because it advocates for fair and just supports and reminds this nation of its shameful treatment of its military veterans. That's one reason.

The other reason I support this organization is that VVAW speaks the truth in keeping alive the brutal and shameful history of the American war in Vietnam. Every article in *The Veteran* that relates someone's experience in those jungles brings back the reality of the war in a time when sheer spin predominates or sheer amnesia disposes of the reality. We can argue about the purposes and strategies of that war. But we cannot argue about the misery of its prosecution and how hard it was fought. We must keep the truth alive. Every issue of *The Veteran* is like reading the biblical prophets who did not foretell the future but testified about the past and present. So much of the debate over the history of that war tries to spin the experience one way or another. How about we first let those who were there tell their stories?

And so, I go on opposing war and bloated military budgets while I support people who did what I refused to do. Honor the warrior, not the war, indeed. And honor the history.

Ray O'Loughlin lives in Denver, Colorado.

Stars, Bars and Stripes: A History of Incarcerated Veterans Since Vietnam

Jason A. Higgins

In the aftermath of the American War in Vietnam, veterans were more likely to be imprisoned than non-veterans. As a historian, it is my job to ask why; as an oral historian, I look to veterans for the answers. As Vietnam Veterans Against the War knows all too well, many veterans returned to the "world" still carrying the weight of unreconciled memories of participating in an unpopular war. Without support networks, survivors of trauma experienced readjustment challenges that left many at risk of imprisonment. The Incarcerated Veterans Project seeks to bring justice to hundreds of thousands of US military veterans in prison or on parole, and I'm asking readers of *The Veteran* to help reach those goals.

My name is Jason Higgins. I am a Ph.D. student in American History at UMass Amherst, researching the connections between military-related trauma and imprisonment. As an oral historian, I have interviewed over fifty veterans of war over the past six years.

I am currently conducting an Incarcerated Veterans Oral History Project to give voice to the most invisible population of veterans in the country. This project documents the experiences of incarcerated veterans from the Vietnam War to the recent conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. If possible, I record audio and video but can also interview via telephone or correspond with letters. I uphold the best practices of the Oral History Association, including informed consent. I plan to archive these oral histories in the W.E.B. DuBois Library and the Library of Congress Veterans History Project, including the experiences of incarcerated veterans in the history of the United States. I have recently begun interviewing veterans, but I still need to locate and contact more veterans imprisoned after war, especially Vietnam.

This project investigates the relationship between trauma and the difficulties of postwar readjustment. To connect mass incarceration to the Vietnam War, my research examines the ways in which trauma, disability, institutional racism, discharge status, and the disparities in the criminal justice system contributed to the imprisonment rates of hundreds of thousands of veterans.

Historians have customarily overlooked the postwar lives of veterans, and none have adequately sought to preserve the experiences of imprisoned veterans. The Department of Justice reported that 73,000 veterans were incarcerated in 1978: this figure accounts for one-fourth of the total prison population.

Many traumatized veterans reintegrated from Vietnam without access to mental health services or community support. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Health Disorders (DSM-III) officially recognized PTSD in 1980, but the court systems have only recently begun to acknowledge the effects of PTSD in criminal cases involving war veterans.

Since the War on Drugs, the total number of American citizens in prison increased from 300,000 to 1.5 million. Thanks to grassroots organizations and activist veterans, the growth rate of incarcerated veteran populations did not rise as exponentially as numbers for the rest of the country, but since 1978, the total number still doubled.

As one of the enduring lessons of the American War in Vietnam, many veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan came home to a more welcoming public reception, but "Support the Troops" rarely translates into action. Any substantial help typically comes from other veterans, their organizations or lobbying groups. Because of efforts by these groups, survivors of military trauma today have more rehabilitation systems in place to help them transition to peace.

Veterans who self-medicate with alcohol and drugs have Veterans Treatment Court, which helps them break the cycle of trauma and incarceration. However, most Veterans Treatment Courts disqualify the most serious offenders and felons, those in most desperate need of help. According to the Department of Justice report in 2012, sixty-four percent of veterans in prison were charged with violent assault. None of these veterans is eligible for the rehabilitation court programs.

Veterans with less-than-honorable discharges are also denied VA benefits, health care, disability benefits, home loans, job-training, and education programs. With cruel irony, military service members are routinely discharged with less-than-honorable status from incidents related to their PTSD and then denied mental health care treatment because of their discharge.

As a result of the recent increase in veteran suicides, the VA changed its policy to allow emergent care for suicidal veterans. For many, though, these changes are too little, too late.

Vietnam veterans had all the problems that combat trauma survivors have today, with none of the resources. Many have been in and out of prison since coming home, and theirs are the voices we need to hear. Vietnam veterans in prison, unfortunately, are the least accessible and the most vulnerable, as the generation gets older. Many are now institutionalized, left in their prison cells and worlds of isolation, out of sight and out of mind of the American public.

But, I intend to make sure they are not forgotten to history. My oral history project seeks to humanize incarcerated veterans, to bring them out of the shadows of the criminal justice system and preserve their testimonies for future generations.

I am asking members of the Vietnam Veterans Against the War to share my project and bring awareness to the systemic crises facing military service men and women. I hope this newspaper will help me extend an invitation to veterans willing to talk about their experiences in the military and the criminal justice system. Thank you.

Write to me at:
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Some short clips of recent interviews can be found on my social media page; please like and share: https://m.facebook.com/incarceratedveteranshistory/

Jason A. Higgins, a Ph.D. student in American History at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, focuses on the American War in Vietnam. He earned a Master's in English from Oklahoma State University and wrote his thesis on Lew Puller's Fortunate Son and narratives of trauma, disability, and veteran suicide.

VVAW in Washington, DC, July 4, 1974.

Taking a Knee for Peace: Recalling the Veterans Who Sat

JERRY LEMBCKE

It was my own moment of reckoning—stand and salute for the Star-Spangled Banner or sit? The moment returns in memory, brought back by the current flap involving Colin Kaepernick's refusal to stand for the National Anthem. Kaepernick was a quarterback for the San Francisco 49ers football team who did not stand for the playing of the Star-Spangled Banner before the start of the 49ers game against the Green Bay Packers on August 26, 2016. The next week against the San Diego Chargers, he sat again.

My own first protest sit-down made was indelibly set—Fort Lewis Army Base in February, 1970—and the stakes—retention in the Army as a draftee, if not reassignment to Vietnam etched it in memory. But back to the Kaepernick story.

Kaepernick says he is "not going to stand up and show support for a country that oppresses black people and people of color." The reaction to his protest has been mixed with most, and the loudest, voices expressing opposition. Kaepernick's supporters are fewer in number but count among themselves some fellow athletes.

Curiously though, both camps invoke the memory of war veterans to bolster their positions. Against Kaepernick's action, retired Colonel James Zumwalt called the sit-down, "a slap in the face to others of all ethnicities who only wish they could, once again, stand as it is played—our courageous veterans whose battlefield wounds have left them legless to do so." CNN found other critics of Kaepernick citing veteran sacrifices to support their views, while still others, quoted in the same link, support the QB on the grounds that veterans fought for his exercise of free speech.

With many voices using veterans to support their cases, pro and con, on Kaepernick's action, it was a relief to find an article actually written by a veteran in support of his protest. In the article currently posted at Jacobin, veteran Rory Fanning captures the inspiration that Kaepernick provides for veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan. Fanning especially appreciates the risks to career and reputation that the 49ers star is taking, and describes his own apprehension when not standing for the National Anthem in support of Kaepernick.

I support the position that Kaepernick has taken and I'm glad to hear veterans' voices like Fanning's that counterbalance the exploitation of veteran identity for what I think is kneejerk patriotism; the courage shown by Fanning for conducting his own sympathy sit-down is especially laudable. But recognition of veterans who support quarterback Kaepernick and even demonstrate their solidarity as Fanning has done, still leaves a gap in the national discourse about veterans, patriotism, and symbols like the National Anthem, a gap that can be narrowed with some historical perspective.

It would surprise no one that not standing for the National Anthem was a common act of protest against the war in Vietnam in the late 1960s and early 1970s. And given the tenor of the times—during which some veterans joined the movement against the war—veterans' support for the sitters was not uncommon. But what has been largely washed out of American memory about the war years is that veterans not only supported the protesters, as Fanning has done, but enacted their own refusals to stand in dissent from their own war and the part they played in it—it was their cause that they sat for, not someone else's or someone else's protest that the veterans supported.

But there is more to the story. Even while still in uniform, and with consequences way more dire than public disdain at stake, some soldiers were defying military authority. My own gut-check came when I rotated back to the States from Vietnam in 1970. Resistance to the military authority and the war was rife within the ranks by then. Observing the stateside Moratorium Days against the War in the fall of 1969, many of us could not wait to return home and join the Movement. Some didn't wait—some field units refused patrol assignments in support of the Moratorium, while other wore black armbands to show their solidarity with the protesters back home. The sabotage of operations was not uncommon by that time and actual attempts to kill officers and NCOs were frequent enough to unsettle commanders. Some of that history is documented in the 2006 film *Sir! No Sir!* about in-service dissent during the war,

Contrary to the shibboleth that we were in Vietnam to "fight for the flag," the common retort was that we were there "because of the flag!"—the meaning being that it was mindless patriotism that had put our lives and limbs at risk on the wrong side of a war that we were destined to lose. Commitments to "never stand for the flag again"—sometimes made promiscuously with the machismo-enhancement of good weed, for sure—were virtual credential checks of the warriors-against-the-war we were expected to have become.

By my date to return to the states, word had trickled back from those who had gone before about the logistics of processing-out for flights home and the procedures that awaited us when we landed in the states. Contrary to the myths popularized years later that we were warned about the spitting hippies awaiting us (there were no such warnings), some of us actually hoped to be greeted by anti-war activists hoping to sign us up—that didn't happen either (as far as I know). What did give us pause were reports that we would have to stand one last time at the out-processing center and sing the National Anthem. In the resistance-rich culture we were leaving, the declarations of "No way!" and "Ain't gonna happen!" were easy to make; separated from those peers after a long flight from Vietnam, glad to be home in one piece, and looking forward to reunions with family and friends, the talk was not so easy to walk.

I landed at McCord Airforce Base near Seattle and was taken from there to nearby Ft. Lewis for processing. After a meal and the completion of paperwork, I was ushered with a group of 10 to 20 other returnees, none of whom had ever met, into a small room where we were told, in military fashion, that upon command we WOULD come to attention and WOULD salute/pledge/sing (whatever) in accordance with whatever followed.

For me it was a time of reckoning. I had never done anything more political than vote before being drafted and in Vietnam I had participated in only low levels of dissent—whistle blowing on higher-ups, and work slowdown types of things. My one brush with the military justice system had been scary; the capriciousness and the callousness of its administrators was breathtaking. Rumors abounded among enlisted personnel that military authorities were cracking down on dissent. My father had died just before I was inducted in 1968 leaving my mother alone in a small town in Iowa, albeit surrounded by neighbors and family; she was not political at all and would never understand my choice to dissent rather than come home. Would failure to stand, salute, and sing result in a court-martial? Could I be held at Ft. Lewis for legal prosecution? Even incarcerated? Could I be sent back to Vietnam? The questions flooded my mind.

Being seated in the small room, we were thanked for our service and then, yes, told to stand and salute. In the split-second I had for making a decision, not a muscle moved—not mine or, I sensed, anyone else's. The entire room, excepting the officer in charge, stayed sitting. Without missing a beat—suggesting this had become routine for him—the officer moved along as if all was normal, hitting the play button for the National Anthem—and we sat.

It was an empowering moment for me. To have taken what, in the moment, appeared to be a huge risk with my own freedom and needs of my mother, and see that others, who were perfect strangers, were taking the same risk was reassuring, a real reality check validating my own experience. More importantly, I overcame my own fears of recrimination, fear that I might look "too radical," or being stigmatized for nonconformity. It was my own test-of-self and I had passed.

In the midst of the Kaepernick affair, news reports are telling us quite a lot about the history of the National Anthem in sporting events. I'm quite sure the Anthem was not part of my high school sports scene in the 1950s and I don't recall it being played at my college games in the 1960s. After the war in Vietnam I remember sitting for the Anthem on various occasions but that was a widespread practice at the time. I was shocked then when attending an Iowa-Wisconsin basketball game in Madison in the mid-80s to be one of the few fans staying seated while it played. Madison—cradle of the Movement!

But times had changed. It was the Reagan era and we learned from Rambo that we had lost the war in Vietnam because "somebody wouldn't let us win," that POWs had been left behind, and that veterans had been spat on. Lost in that mythology of home-front betrayal was the history that thousands of troops in Vietnam and veterans upon return had joined in resisting the war and help end it.

It takes courage for Kaepernick to do what he is doing and for Fanning and the rest of us to sit with him. It helps to know that we are not alone when we defy social conventions for good reasons. It helps, additionally, to know that others have done it before, and that for that we need to recover the lost themes of history—like soldiers and veterans who embraced dissent on behalf of their own values despite great risk to themselves. It is a call for historians to help fill those gaps in public memory and for veterans themselves who "took a knee" for peace to speak up.

Originally published September 05, 2016 by Common Dreams.

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Walkin' the Talk (Therapy)

J. Michael Orange

My left foot was pulsating with a piston-like throb in the waiting room when a man opened the office door. He looked about my age and my height but so thin, especially in the face. "Please, come in and sit down," he said as he motioned toward a simple cushioned chair. "My name is Thomas." Early morning sunlight streaming in the sole window cast a warm glow on the frames that held his psychology degree and psychologist's license. Books filled every remaining available space. It was a comfortable space, a secure place from which to burrow back into dark and dangerous pasts and grapple with questions I didn't want to answer.

Thomas sat, slipped off his shoes, and effortlessly gathered his winnowy legs into a full lotus position. His forte, I soon learned, is his ability to combine Western psychotherapy with Eastern philosophy. I immediately noticed an intensity in his eyes that his wire-rimmed glasses softened only a little; perhaps a vestige of the thousand-yard stare he developed as a Marine grunt walking the point in Vietnam. We had walked the same walks and could talk the same language. The journey back began.

My tour of duty in Vietnam (1969-1970) produced a case of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) that I now know is very typical for combat vets. The effort necessary to realize this took half a lifetime and excessively taxed the patience and compassion of the people closest to me, especially my wife, Cynthia, and daughter, Jessica. My course of talk therapy (which didn't include the use of drugs) ran forty-four sessions over a nine-month period that started in April of 2003.

By our third session, Thomas reached his diagnosis and the VA agreed six months later that I was partially disabled due to combat-induced PTSD. "PTSD expressed by agitated depression, emotional flooding, intensive traumatic recollections, feelings of detachment and estrangement from others, sense of foreshortened future, difficulty concentrating, chronic stress and fear of physical and emotional breakdown." This was Thomas's diagnosis. I wondered if there was a 32-word cure for this 32-word conclusion.

"Let's start with the things that brought you into this office," Thomas began during our first session. "How did you feel coming home?" My eyes focused on the highly polished oak floorboards. I had no answer. With a series of gentle questions, he teased out of me the memory of the fear I had that my family would not accept the person I had become or forgive me for what I had done and not done in Vietnam. Like some toxic virus morphing in a Petri dish, the war infected my moral DNA. The Marines had trained me in a belief system that appealed to the still-reptilian part of my brain and empowered me to believe deep in my gut that I could kill people because they were the enemy that would be trying to kill me. My mortar rounds did kill people in Vietnam, most of whom had tried to kill me. But some were probably civilians, just caught in the carnage that is war.

"Your soul is wounded." Patrick went on to explain. "When people suffer from moral injury, their core moral identity can be destroyed. They can develop a warped system of internal justice that demands a penance; that says they deserve punishment, to be unhappy, or even to die." Thomas leaned in even further towards me. "The Marines gave you the best training in the world to be a good soldier, even in the moral wasteland of war. But there is no boot camp to restore you as a good civilian." He eased back in his chair. "That's why we're here together. You aren't responsible for having PTSD, but you are responsible for getting the help you need to deal with it." With an assuring smile, he added, "Now we're going to bring you the rest of the way home."

During combat, my emotions became so extreme they created their polar opposites. Terror sparked adrenalized excitement. Panic birthed the resolution required to control it. The unrelenting chaos of a firefight—when I remember screaming into the cacophony, "I want it to stop! I want it to stop!"—led to desperation that finally neutralized these conflicting emotions and left me feeling nothing at all, floating in an undecodable world.

"In Vietnam we had a mantra," I said. It don't mean nothin'. A knowing smirk showed on Thomas' face. It was a necessary, all-purpose lie we used as a bandage to keep our consciences from bleeding out and keep in the rage necessary to fight in Vietnam. We used it as a mask and blindfold to filter out the smell of burning villages and rotting corpses and screen out the faces of children drained of hope, family, and future. It hid our faces from ourselves, each other, and our role as invaders. We got so good at telling this lie that we kept telling it even after we came home to a nation that didn't want to hear our stories. We hung on to it like it was the last chopper out of Saigon.

Vietnam gave me the opportunity to explore the very best in me and to face the very worst. When I came home, I tried to fit back into my former life but I had to restrain my urge to revolt at the triviality of my friends' concerns while my fellow Marines were still fighting back in the jungle. It strained my nerves until I thought they would fry from too much voltage. Instead of screaming, I just went along like a foreigner pretending to understand the conversation. I became a "closet vet."

Thomas asked about my most difficult symptom since Vietnam, and I tried to describe what I call my "crash into my primordial sadness." It is a physical thing—a dark force like a shadowy wraith that lurked waiting to thrust its sword between the plates of the emotional armor I had perfected. A pit opens and I become trapped in an M.C. Escher sketch of stairs that never stop going down. I did not understand it; could not explain it; could not control it. My bawling like a baby so embarrassed me, I only felt safe in Cynthia's tender arms. This would go on and on until I didn't think I had any more tears left in me.

With Thomas's help, I learned to recognize this deep, debilitating sadness as a psychological place with two warring inhabitants: The first is the apprehensive voice of the traumatized twenty-year-old soldier, and the other is the falsely empowered young man who takes on an attitude of contempt for his own pain. To use a male-female analogy, the timid "feminine" voice feels the pain of the trauma and the tears flow, and a moment later the harsh "masculine" voice immediately says to stuff it and quit whining. It was like those two cartoon characters of the devil and angel that sit on opposite shoulders giving opposite directions.

The military (and especially the Marine Corps) promises to make men out of boys. Unfortunately, the experience usually accomplishes half the job. We come out of the fires of war with our masculine halves strong as tempered steel but our feminine halves jailed by our testosterone-driven halves.

Thomas offered an explanation. "The harsh boy had served to protect you from the poison of war and to help you develop a good life. Now you are mature enough and strong enough to take the next step and re-integrate all aspects of your personality, including the tender-hearted boy."

Under the gentle guidance from Thomas, I learned to distinguish between repressing feelings and embracing them by fully acknowledging the consequences of my losses and trauma. We did this extremely difficult work together mindful that I should not use Vietnam and PTSD as a convenient excuse whenever reality did not match up to my expectations. "It's a mental disorder," said Thomas, "not a copout."

Thomas asked if there was a key thing that would keep me on track. It was the easiest question he'd asked. "Cynthia," I said. With saint-like patience and wisdom, she has cared for me with non-judgmental love, patience, compassion, and acceptance since 1973 when we married. Thomas said it well, "Cynthia's such an important person for you, helping you home finally from Vietnam, tear by tear."

J. Michael Orange experienced combat in numerous search-and-destroy missions during his tour of duty. In 2001, he published a memoir, "Fire in the Hole: A Mortarman in Vietnam." https://www.amazon.com/Fire-Hole-Mortarman-Michael-Orange/dp/0595160034

What I Knew of Him

I watch as my father, from where he sits on the burnt orange chair,
bends over a spread newspaper on the floor, his army boots, dress shoes,
war medals arrayed before him. The TV is on. Water fills one side of a
round metal tin, the other holds black polish. A red and white can of Brasso.
Wearing a boot on one hand, he wraps an old white T-shirt around the index
and middle fingers of the other, dips polish, then water, rubbing the boot's
side. He's taken the laces out. He rubs the crinkled leather quickly, buffs it
with the clean part. "Squared away," he used to say, "Get things squared away,"
he ordered my brothers. The dress shoes, he buffs to a sheen,
slapping white cotton against each.

He was to me this sharp metallic smell, polish and Brasso, and a silver
Zippo lighter with the Army Ranger insignia, fluid smell I liked, scarred
knuckle as he ignited the cotton wick in flame to light his Belair. Hair on
a tanned forearm, sinewy strength and fear, a pile of change and keys on his
dresser. Ceremonial dagger that had been attached to a plaque from
Viet Nam. He removed it to put in his bedside drawer.

From the couch, I watch him polish the shoes, sometimes also my
brother's small shoes, lined up like fists. Brasso on the medals for his
dress uniform. I don't know what he did or what they were for.

In a box in the attic, black and white pictures of slim soldiers squinting
in the heat and rubble, some shirtless, sunglasses, wrinkled fatigue pants.
In another, my father, in his 20s, beside a South Vietnamese soldier,
smiling. Leftover cans of C-rations, an olive drab flashlight, backpack,
and a Vietnamese flag, rumpled and stained. My mother helped us make
a tape to send him for Christmas when he was gone. To me, he had sent
a Geisha doll in a glass case and an abalone cameo pendant,
"To Captain Lowe's daughter," inscribed on the back.

My brothers and I watched, laughing, as he suddenly lunged forward
into a handstand, balancing in the family room next to the coffee table,
his legs arching towards to TV, over to the lamp, his hands dancing the
floor, righting himself while my mother winced.

—Christine E. Black

The Sound of PTSD

Gregory Ross

In a PTSD group consisting of nine men, a door slammed. I was the only one who "startled." We are all combat vets of varying degrees. I am by some standards, of the least degree since I never set foot "in-country," but floated a mile off the coast of Vietnam with the 7th Fleet in support of ground troops with "guns" capable of firing 335 pound shells. Our work station was directly below a cannon. A lot of percussion and concussion to absorb. Perhaps why I was the only one who "startled." My work station was also where I slept because the communications equipment required a temperature of no more than 75 degrees to function correctly. Sleeping in the ship proper, where it was often 100 to 120 degrees, was less desirable. Since there were only three enlisted men in the Communications Technician rating and we worked 12 on 12 off, we slept in the work spaces. "A lot of percussion and concussion to absorb."

Since 1969, the year I pulled Sea Duty, to the present, loud noises startle me. The Fourth of July in particular. Some fool in our neighborhood would purchase a lot of M80s and fire them daily, the week before the Fourth. On the Fourth, everything went crazy. The fool finished off his M80s, the week after the Fourth. It felt unrelenting. Often, I would join our dog under the bed, both of us shaking, her with fear, me with rage.

Some parts of my nervous system have gotten better. For years, any sound approximate to gears clanking drove me obsessively out of control. I had to silence it, immediately. An example: my wife and I drank bottled ice tea while driving. We placed the glass bottles on the floor behind her seat, where they clanked, which reminded me of the sound of the gears that moved the "guns" on the ships. Much to her dismay, I swerved to pull over on the freeway to stop the sound. She thought I should have kept it together until an exit and pulled off. She eventually accepted I could not do that, but still felt that I had needlessly endangered us. I agreed that it may have been an endangerment, but not needlessly. Now, I am able to better tolerate sounds that remind me of the gears. I no longer would pull the car over on the freeway, but would get off as soon as possible.

About two years after my discharge I got a job through a federally-funded program designed to put people to work. You got extra points for being a veteran, an ex-convict, or disabled (physically or mentally). Some vets got points for all four. I was sent to work at the county hospital in Buffalo, New York, where we did make work. We got paid, they got the administrative monies and the good PR. I was on a crew assigned to rake leaves on the grounds of the hospital which had five buildings. First, we raked leaves, eight hours a day, five days a week. Then we shoveled snow, eight hours a day, five days a week. Because of the harsh winters in Buffalo, the five buildings comprising the Hospital campus were connected by tunnels, one of which I ducked into to warm up. In the tunnel a few minutes, long enough to wander away from the access door, a booming, angry voice screamed out, "I hate them all. I'll kill them all. They killed my men." "Them" was a racial slur for people of Japanese descent. I backed up towards the access door and held the shovel to use as a weapon if I couldn't get out of the tunnel on time. The voice grew louder. A gurney with a large Buffalo City Police Officer strapped down was being pushed towards what I knew was the mental health ward.

The last part of this piece is so small, but in some ways the most significant. Loud noises? Of course, a PTSD trigger. Screaming WWII vets in the throes of a flash-back? Distressing of course. But, a pen clicking? In a writing group of veterans, I was sitting at a table with another vet. It was a silent writing period of one and a half hours. I got stuck on a thought and was mindlessly clicking my pen. The other participant, an "in-country" veteran, reached over and placed his hand over the pen and whispered, "Please stop, it sounds like..." I don't remember the exact words, but it had to do with loading and readying his weapon before going out on patrol.

From an M80 to a supposedly benign click of a pen: the sound of PTSD.

Gregory Ross was in the Navy during Vietnam, 7th Fleet, Gun Line [1969]. He published an anthology, "Veterans of War, Veterans of Peace," edited by Maxine Hong Kingston.

(l-r) Ron Arm, Clarence Fitch, Manuel Martinez, Mike Pahios, Bill Davis, Mike Gillen. VVAW in Nicaragua, 1986.

Dancing in the Streets

for Martha & the Vandellas

The summer I was fifteen, I discovered
girls, and beer, and cigarettes,
how to dance, and how to lie
and get away with it. That summer,
everyone around the world
was dancing in the streets.
Except in Perkasie, a one-horse town
without so much as a traffic light
where fun was watching Lawrence Welk
or listening to the corn grow.
Christ, my mother didn't get it,
wouldn't even let me go
seven miles to Quakertown to dance.
St. Isadore's, for cryin' in a bucket.
Teen dance at a Catholic Church
chaperoned by priests and nuns.
"There's lots to do in Perkasie," she said.
What did she know? Lawrence Welk.
So I just said I'd be at Larry Rush's house,
hitchhiked up to Quakertown instead,
danced with Andrea Jenkins, had
the best time ever in my life,
concluded what my parents didn't know
wouldn't hurt them. Freedom!
What a heady feeling. All the world
at my disposal; all I had to do was lie.
This was 1964. What did I know?
Selma, Watts, Detroit, Khe Sanh, My Lai,
the cost and consequence of lies
had not yet come collecting what was due.

—W. D. Ehrhart

THE VETERAN
SECTION C
Volume 47, Number 2 Fall 2017

Teaching and Traveling in Vietnam

KIM SCIPES

I spent this past summer (2017) in Vietnam, teaching a sociology course at Ton Duc Thang University (TDTU) in Ho Chi Minh City. TDTU is located in the southern part of the city in District 7.

Friends who had previously taught at TDTU had been asked if there were any Americans they knew who had good politics and who might be willing to teach in Vietnam. My friends gave my name to the head of the sociology department, a woman named Le Thi Mai, and she invited me for a conference last year, and then to come back and teach this year.

This was new to me, since I missed the all-expenses paid tours conducted by the US Government in the 1960's and early '70's that so many others "enjoyed." I spent 33 ½ months in Yuma, Arizona at a Marine Corps Air Station, working on avionics equipment on A-4's, while pilots were learning how to bomb and strafe.

As folks probably know, after the country was unified on April 30, 1975, Saigon was renamed Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC). It's a lot larger now, over 9 million people when it was probably between 4-5 million during much of the "American" war. Parts of it today would seem familiar to those who were there previously, but there is so much modern construction currently, that it would seem completely different in many parts of the city. And they are building a subway today, which is definitely needed.

Vietnam suffered economically after the war, in no small part to US revenge and intransigence. Since 1986, with the Doi Moi (reform) program, the country has enticed extensive foreign capital investment, and, based on the backs of its workers and peasants, has been one of the fastest growing economies in the world since 2000. While they haven't eliminated poverty, they have drastically reduced it. Some people are getting very rich. Obviously, there are some problems with this.

Nonetheless, the average person is still pretty poor. There are relatively few cars, many of which are Lexus', BMW's, Range Rovers, etc., but most of the vehicles are motorbikes. Riding through HCMC is truly an adventure. It seems the only traffic law they absolutely obey is the one about only one object being in one place at one time, other than that, it's "game on"! It's not uncommon to see someone begin a left-hand turn at an intersection from the far right-hand side of the horde. Yet, somehow, they make it work. I haven't seen a single accident yet, although I did see one man frown when cut off.

It's hard to say what's going on in the new buildings and government offices, so my comments are only from what I've personally observed while walking/riding around the city, either by myself, although I don't speak the language, or with others, whether on the back of a motorbike, a bus or in a taxi.

One of the things I've most noticed is the caring and kindness to other people. Like I said, even in the chaotic rush hour I've never seen anyone yelling, screaming or threatening other people. The cops don't wear guns or even the big police belts. The only armed guards I've seen have been in a bank when I've gone to exchange money. There are security guards outside many businesses, but none of them are armed and I wonder how many are there simply to soak up excess labor, and thus aren't really needed, and how many are truly there for protection. I never saw any situations where people acted afraid of each other, and I walked around fairly late at night by myself.

Something amazing to me was how welcoming students and folks on the street were of me as an American. They have truly put the war behind them. When I was in Europe in the early 1980's, we never talked about WW II, so, in Vietnam, with 40 years past the war, it's weird but probably not surprising that the war is not much discussed. The only place this came up was, as I traveled through the rest of the country, I kept getting asked how old I was (65 then, now 66). I thought I knew what was going on, but finally had to ask, it was the war, huh? Yep. There really are only a few old people that you see in public, and the government is unprepared for the mobility challenges that will hit as people in their fifties get older. Thank the activists for the American Disabilities Act!

Kim Scipes with his students in Ho Chi Minh City.

Gate to the university, founded in 1070, The Citadel of Literature.

Last year, I visited the War Remnants Museum, which is where they recall the American war. A number of US tanks, artillery, helicopters and even jets are parked outside. Inside are a lot of artifacts from the war, many pictures and equipment we've all seen over the years, but there is also a big area devoted to Agent Orange and its effects, including today. To be honest, I couldn't hang there, and left the museum. There are a lot of hideous pictures being shared.

This year, I visited the old South Vietnamese presidential palace. It's actually a beautiful building, very well designed, built and maintained. As you travel through it, things are explained in Vietnamese and English to accommodate the many tourists who visit. But as I got up on the third and highest level of the building, I looked out and, no sign or anything, saw a recently painted Huey sitting on the outside roof! I guess no comment needed.

They also have replicas of the two tanks that broke through the palace walls on April 30, 1975. One sign even lists the crew members' names.

I was scheduled to teach for eight weeks, but just before leaving, Professor Mai told me they had made a mistake and that students had their internships to go to, so I only had three weeks to teach my course on Qualitative Research Methods! I tore my course apart and completely redesigned it — the students loved it. This is the only university in Vietnam where students must pass a test in English to graduate, so I taught in English with no translation. Over 80% got an 80 or above on their exam. Almost half got an 80 or above after the 30-45 minute interviews they did on improving the educational system at TDTU and writing them up in English! They busted their asses for me and I've been invited back for next summer.

The good thing with the changed schedule is that it allowed me to travel. I went to Nha Trang on the bus. The beaches are incredible, with many Russian tourists today. I took the train to Da Nang, where I rode the cable car up to the Ba Na Hills. A friend of mine who was in the area back in the day thinks it was up Charley Ridge, but the clouds came in and I could see nothing but one small wire as we went up 1,500 meters! But just looking down at the terrain we crossed, my respect for those who humped those hills only grew, there was a reason I went into Marine Air! And then took the train to Ha Noi. Just like they break the name Sai Gon into two words, they break Hanoi into Ha Noi.

I really like Ha Noi, not nearly as chaotic as Ho Chi Minh City. I visited a university that had been founded there in the year 1070, before any university in Europe. It was established to train people to run the state apparatus for the Chinese. And we thought we were going to beat them! I went to the Museum of the Revolution and I visited the old French colonial prison called Hoa Lo Prison, part of it is where they held American fliers shot down over the north and perhaps is better known as the Hanoi Hilton. However, I can say one thing, no matter how bad the US prisoners had it, it was nothing compared to what the Vietnamese revolutionaries jailed by the French suffered. This was what was called hard time. Unfortunately, I didn't get the chance to visit the Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum.

The most enjoyable thing that I stumbled on in Ha Noi was on Friday night. In the center of the city is Hoam Kiem Lake, it reminds me of Lake Merritt in Oakland. The night I was there, there were tens of thousands of Vietnamese out, enjoying a warm summer night, walking on the lakeside, getting ice cream for the kids. It was so relaxed, friendly, and peaceful. I walked around the entire lake before heading back to my hotel.

In all, a fascinating trip, where I met some amazing people. Worth checking out again, this time unarmed.

KIM SCIPES, PH.D., SERVED IN THE MARINES AS AN ENLISTED MAN FROM 1969-73. FOUR THE PAST 14 YEARS, HE'S BEEN TEACHING AT (THE RENAMED) PURDUE UNIVERSITY NORTHWEST IN WESTVILLE, IN.

The Presidential Palace.

W.D. Ehrhart in Conversation

SANFORD KELSON (REVIEWER)

W.D. Ehrhart in Conversation – Vietnam, America and the Written Word, edited by Jean-Jacques Malo *(McFarland, 2017)*

After I read the book, it confirmed that the editor's introduction is superb, thus the next paragraph is taken from it verbatim:

> Studs Terkel introduced Ehrhart as "the poet of the Vietnam War." Librarian and scholar David A. Willson called him a "master essayist." Donald Anderson termed Ehrhart's memoir Vietnam-Perkasie "the best single unadorned, gut-felt telling of one American's route into and out of America's longest war while Michael Uhl, writing in *The Nation* tagged Ehrhart's memoir Busted "an American original." Historian H. Bruce Franklin wrote that Ehrhart is "the preeminent figure in Vietnam literature...and himself unsurpassed as a poet."

Ehrhart considers his work to be much more diverse than generally acknowledged and that he is much more multi-dimensional than a Vietnam War poet. I am merely an interested reader and cannot judge art as scholars and students of poetry can. Nevertheless, not being competent in a subject never stopped me from opining on it, to wit: All of Ehrhart's works are indeed exceptional.

Ehrhart's combat experiences caused him to quickly, maybe intuitively, conclude that the war was severely and morally wrong. After discharge, and some emotional re-adjustment, he immersed himself in study of how and why the US got into Vietnam and mastered the subject. His experience and study, coupled with being the moral man that he is, informs his poetry such that he cannot be honored in anyway but as the poet of the American War. Plus, his essays, books and verbal skills are also exceptional and special.

Many people are attracted to his war poetry but I suggest that people might also explore his non-Vietnam War work. Yes, the Vietnam War spoke to Ehrhart and he writes about the war in a powerful way, however, he applied what he heard to other aspects of his life. It would be correct to conclude that his morality and understanding and passion for life, sparked to a considerable extent by his war experience, qualify him as a renaissance man. Ehrhart considers himself a "normal" poet and not as somebody who can only speak about the Vietnam War.

Ehrhart says that all of his poems are a part of his own story and that story is his life. His life is sometimes political, sometimes not, and sometimes mixed. He gives examples, one of which is: "Take my poem Responsibility. Its first stanza is about me waking up after a night of love, but from there the poem turns to Central America and the whole dictatorial system of the region." The poem shows how private and public awareness can blend into one another and is also only one example in the book of how his thinking and maturing over three decades has evolved. This book may enlighten the reader, as it has me, about aspects of life that might not otherwise be discovered.

The book consists of 19 interviews conducted over three decades by diverse people including, for example, high school students and honored scholars. I have randomly selected examples of Ehrhart's responses to various interviewers' questions, intertwining some of the responses, to wit:

> Ehrhart gets the feeling that scholars tend to forget what they are actually talking about in their academic studies of the war. In response to a question involving scholarship about the war, Ehrhart said, in part, that he tries to remind scholars that the war is not an abstract thing "...we are talking about millions of lives that were destroyed, we are talking about bodies coming apart forcibly ... that this stuff was real, killing was on a grand scale."

I believe that Ehrhart may not be able to talk, write or even think about the war without being passionate and that is why his writing is so powerful. It is why he connects so well with his readers and listeners. Scholars, without the war experience, cannot connect with others in this way.

Furthermore, the war experience, I believe, has made Ehrhart much more attuned to the good things in life, which he also writes poems about, like love for his wife and daughter, for the high school students who he teachers, and for his friends and nature, too. He relates that all his writings are in the final analysis about his life and therefore it's all very personal. He gives an example: "US tax dollars were spent at a million and a half a day on killing in El Salvador." He says it was done in his name. Erhrart says, "If that isn't personal I do not know what is." If Ehrhart had not served in Vietnam would he have ever come to this same deep feeling?

Ehrhart acknowledges that people find some or much of his work controversial. How's this for an example of controversial?

> "Americans should have learned that their leaders often make decisions based on a terrible combination of arrogance and ignorance, and that Americans should always be skeptical when their government says, 'We need your children to fight and die for their country now.' Americans should have learned that what their government leaders tell them is not always the truth. Americans should have learned that the ones who start wars are seldom the ones who fight and die in them. Americans should have learned to mind their own business and stay out of the business of others. Americans should have learned to ask hard questions and pay careful attention to the answers. Americans should have learned that political questions cannot be solved by military means. However, the Reagan Wars in Central America in the 1980's, our current wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and other situations the US has gotten involved in around the world since 1975 clearly demonstrate that few Americans, certainly not those with access to the levers of power, have learned any of those lessons. It makes me very sad."

Americans who are not skeptical may find the above controversial but is it? Those who do find it so may challenge Ehrhart's patriotism. Bill responds to that charge thusly:

> "What do we even mean by patriotism? Love of country? Should I love a country that has the highest murder rate in the world, the highest rate of incarceration, the highest rate of infant mortality in the developed world, the greatest maldistribution of wealth in the developed world, the worst health care delivery system in the developed world? Should I love a country where it is illegal to smoke marijuana but it's okay to wage unprovoked war against Iraq on the fabricated pretext that US security is threatened by weapons of mass destruction? Should I love a country where politicians work for the people who pay for their obscenely expensive election campaigns? Should I love a country that spends more on military weaponry than the entire military budgets of all other countries in the world combined while 20 percent of its children go to bed hungry every night? What do we mean by patriotism? Blind obedience? Willful ignorance of one's own history? I listen to the patriotic drivel that comes out of the mouth of people like George W. Bush and Dick Cheney and Donald Rumsfeld who were nowhere to be found when I was slogging through the rice fields of Vietnam getting my ass shot at, and I think of Samuel Johnson's dictum that, 'Patriotism is the last refuge of a scoundrel.' I love my wife. I love my daughter. I love my friends. I love to go jogging in Valley Green. I love walking into my classroom every morning and engaging my students. I love it when I write a good poem. I pay my taxes. I vote in every election, even the primaries. I do what I can to make the United States an honest country, a country I might be proud of. So far, my efforts don't seem to have made much of a difference. As for 'patriotism,' it's just a mushy abstraction that doesn't really mean much when you take a hard look at it."

"Why do Americans find it so difficult to acknowledge their country's history and the problem of that history," Ehrhart asks. Hmmm, if readers of this review have any reflections on why it is so difficult, consider sending those reflections to VVAW and maybe they will be published.

Part of my answer to "why," if I may go first with my reflection, is that Bill recognizes that his book sales do not do very well and it may be because so many of his books, as he says, deal with "politics being personal which does not make good art and it certainly does not make relaxing reading."

But, maybe good art and relaxation are not the highest and best uses of communication? Maybe understanding the personal nature of politics is a higher use? Bill says: "I simply have things to say, and I'm trying to say them as clearly and compellingly as possible."

In one of his poems Bill "clearly and compellingly" wrote: "silence to injustice/large or small is simply cowardice." Maybe this is why so many Americans watch sports TV every chance they get instead of considering why its government sends so many of its young men and women to kill or be killed, mostly, if not always, for lies. To consider this might provoke guilt and action and maybe, as Bill may be suggesting, many are just too cowardly to put themselves in such a position. Ignorance is safer. Don't read Bill Ehrhart. But, does intentional lack of knowledge of injustice hide or excuse cowardice?

Bill observed that the draft was a force for anti-war protest by college students but as soon as their "asses" were no longer on the line they went home, i.e., fell silent. From the 1970s on, veterans became the driving force of the anti-war movement. These vets' asses were no longer on the front lines either but, nevertheless, they formed and organized VVAW and Bill acknowledges that their voices are still engaged in anti-war activism.

These vets are in it for the long haul because it is the right thing to do. It is not a hard haul just because it is long. It is a hard haul because so many immersed in our entertainment and consumer culture do not want to see, hear or understand and, therefore, these vets are considered disturbers of peace and quiet. And, they pay a personal price for it as Bill explains about his own life in this book.

I wonder whether being considered disturbers of the peace exacerbates Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder? Is thanking vets for their service instead of inquiring about that service often a "polite" way to dismiss the vets? A greeting that is more of a farewell?

Bill is a member of VVAW and he is still engaged, passionately engaged, in the anti-war movement, which will be assisted by this latest book: "W.D. Ehrhart in Conversation – Vietnam, America and the Written Word."

SANFORD KELSON WAS IN THE US ARMY FROM 1963-66, SGT E-5, 171ST INFANTRY BRIGADE, ALASKA. HE IS A LAWYER, MEDIATOR, AND EDUCATOR.

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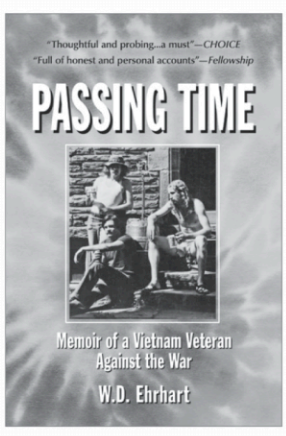
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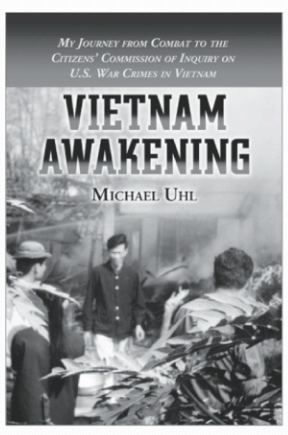

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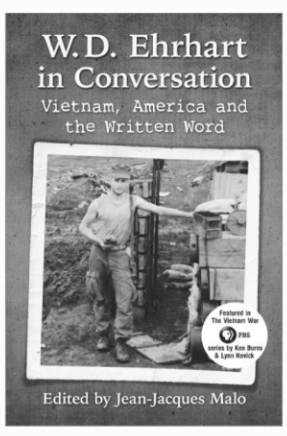

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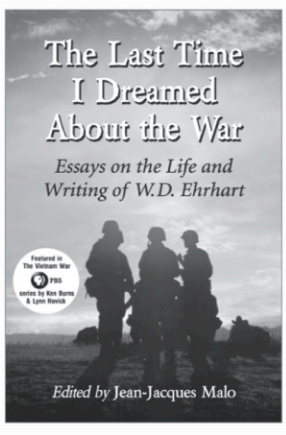

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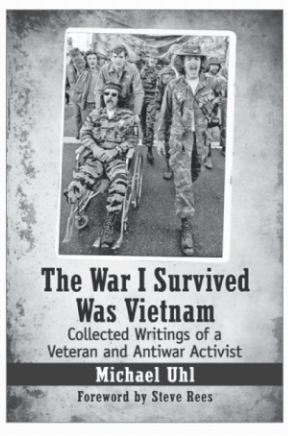

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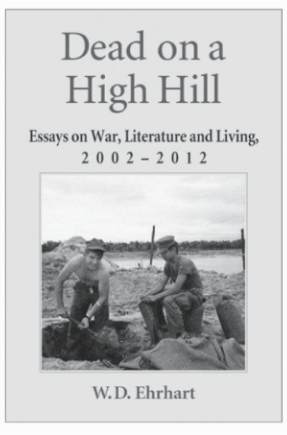

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Hell No

John Ketwig (reviewer)

Hell No: The Forgotten Power of the Vietnam Peace Movement by Tom Hayden
(Yale University Press, 2017)

Tom Hayden was the voice of the Vietnam peace movement, and what an articulate and thoughtful voice it was. He died earlier this year, but before he passed on he left this final book (he authored approximately 22 books!) as a final statement and a fond farewell. Did he know it would be his last? We will never know. But reading "Hell No: The Forgotten Power of the Vietnam Peace Movement" reminds the reader why Tom Hayden came to prominence at a turbulent time when a lot of people were making a lot of noise. His message is clear, accessible, well thought-out, and organized. Most of all, it is authentic. Tom Hayden was at the forefront of it all. He saw the big picture, and he dared to try to make it better. In recent years, the far-right crazies have given the word "patriot" a distasteful connotation, but in reading "Hell No" one can't help but be impressed by the author's patriotism, sincerity, and humanity.

"Hell No" is not a very big book in physical size, but it is enormous in content. It is primarily a very concise history of America's war in Vietnam, and the resulting turmoil in our streets. As this was written we are anticipating the unveiling of Ken Burns' 18-hour, 10-part PBS documentary on Vietnam. Virtually no one expects that series to be realistic, balanced, or at all controversial. The soundtrack CDs are already on sale on Amazon.com. One of them has popular music from the era. I can't imagine what the second, or "original" one contains. There is no soundtrack CD to accompany Tom Hayden's final word on the war. Reading it, one hears the truth ringing loud and true, and one sees a common-sense approach to America's foreign policies and morality that stands as a monument to all the opposition to the Vietnam War. This is a carefully crafted accounting of the goodness and resolve at the front lines of the struggle here at home, and the dirty tricks and fanatical resolve of the powers-that-be who managed, and profited from, the carnage. From start to finish it is a story of everyday, common Americans who had other things to do, but they perceived the importance of what was happening and said, clearly, HELL NO! In a very small package the reader is allowed to see a huge, horrifying record of man's inhumanity toward his fellow man, billions of dollars wasted, and a tragic, ill-conceived power play that poisoned our country's founding principles and resulted in the death of millions of people, plus the suffering of millions more. Tom Hayden was proud to stand up against what was happening, and I suspect he released this book at this time because he saw it all happening again.

John Ketwig is a lifetime member of VVAW, and the author of "...and a hard rain fell: A G.I.'s True Story of the War in Vietnam."

Tree of Smoke

Shelley Masar (reviewer)

Tree of Smoke by Denis Johnson
(Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 2007)

The publisher's cover for "Tree of Smoke", a National Book Award Winner exclaims:

> "There may never be a Vietnam War novel to end all Vietnam War novels, but this one comes about as close to a definitive fictional telling as you can get."
>
> "'Tree of Smoke' is the story of William 'Skip' Sands, CIA, engaged in Psychological Operations against the Vietcong…. It is also the story of Houston brothers Bill and James who drift out of the Arizona desert and into a war where the line between disinformation and delusion has blurred away. It is destined to become one of the classic works of literature produced by that tragic and uncannily familiar war."

I'd never heard of Denis Johnson and never intended to read another Vietnam novel. But Johnson and "Tree of Smoke" are now mainline favorites. Denis Johnson died of liver cancer on May 24, 2017; I discovered him when a poet friend posted his obituary on Facebook. Something about his wide face caught my eye.

"Tree of Smoke" was the fourth of Johnson's books for me. All of his books and poetry center on the world of dispossessed people in the United States who live hard. Most of the characters in "Tree of Smoke" are young American men who "drift" into the war in Vietnam and come out decidedly worse off after their time as Lurps in Asia. Other major characters are older US military brass who came to Vietnam after careers in World War II. Johnson understands their anti-communist disinformation and delusion with insight he gained from a memoir, "Warriors Who Ride the Wind", by William F.X. Band (Castle Books, Inc., 1993).

But he also understands and writes about the women in the war. He respects and describes the despairing American mothers who live alone as widows and divorcees who turn to "polite" religion as their sons enlist against their wishes and return to restless lives and time in jail. He gets the Missionary women, nurses in the field, who lose their faith and face down their bitterness only out of a desire to save the children. He describes the relationships between the Lurps and whores in its banality, and in one case, a gang rape, brutality and indifferent cruelty.

Then there are the Asian characters, the businessman entrepreneur, pimp, tour guide, gun runner in a Malaysian village, the Madam bar owners, the personnel of roadside restaurant shacks. He gets the choices and survival strategies of Vietnamese operatives from all sides, including the "primitives" who didn't give a damn, and only wanted to be left alone.

Johnson is a poet, a gutsy Everyman with a painter's eyes and a good nose. He describes the jungles, the caves, the tunnels of the war, the rapes, the fish soup, the crappy beer, the cigarettes, the drugs, the insane cruelty, and the friendships. It's beautiful, and more often than not, funny, because the people involved are funny – gallows humor, irreverent cannon fodder humor.

The book begins in 1963 and ends in 1983. This is a summation from a letter written in 1983 by one of the protagonists who is about to be hanged in Malaysia for arms trafficking to a woman he met in 1965 when he was a vain CIA op and she a widowed nurse missionary. He is amused by the date, April Fools. April 1,1983:

> "Dearest K,
> Once upon a time there was a war.
>
> There was once a war in Asia that had among its tragedies the fact that it followed World War II a modern war that had somehow managed to retain or revive some of the glories and romances of earlier wars. This Asian war however flailed to give any romances outside of hellish myths.
>
> Among the denizens to be twisted beyond recognition—even, or especially, beyond recognition by themselves, were a young Canadian widow and a young American man who alternately thought of himself as the Quiet American and the Ugly American, and who wished to be neither, who wanted instead to be the Wise American, or the Good American, but who eventually came to witness himself as the Real American and finally as simply the Fucking American."

"Tree of Smoke", like the war itself, is a tragedy. Shakespearian in its sub plots, one of which is the story of a pair of Vietnamese cousins one who goes with the Vietcong only to realize he loathes the re-training camps, the other cousin is a driver for an American Colonel, who betrays his cousin in return for a promise that his immediate family will be relocated when the Americans leave. The cousins' story includes those of their extended family. Both of the cousins have relationships with Americans characterized by affection and trust. One of the lessons of the book seems to be that anyone with a mind, Vietnamese or otherwise, ends up as a double agent, resigned to moral relativism. Again, from the letter:

> "After I left Vietnam. I quit working for the giant-size criminals I served [CIA] when I knew. You started working for the medium size. Lousy hours and no fringe benefits, but the ethics are clearer. And the stakes are plain. You prosper until you're caught. Then you lose everything. We're all the same bunch, but like I say from my end of the telescope [no longer a righteous anti-communist, just a common arms trafficker] the ethics are clearer. Or as x said to x, I have one ship and they call me a pirate. You have a fleet and they call you an Emperor. I can't remember who said it."

The story of Vietnam hasn't ended. In the words of another character, an infamous Colonel in CIA Psychological Operations, once a passionate anti-communist with the grit to have survived as a Japanese prisoner of war in World War II who goes AWOL and begins to preach a different message, a more universal one that applies to bureaucracies of all kinds:

> "… the war hadn't been exclusively terrible. It had delivered a sense, at first dreadful, eventually intoxicating, that something wild, magical, stunning might come from the next moment, death itself might erupt from the fabric of this very breath, unmasked as a friend…"

Here at home as a student demonstrating against the war, I was infected with that wild dreadful sense that something profound was coming home. It has turned out to be a dream often deferred. A dream always up against retraction and reaction. My hat is off to Vietnam Veterans Against the War for your ongoing dream of, commitment to, resistance.

Shelley Washburne Masar is an artist, mother, grandmother who lives in Urbana, Illinois. She reads the Veteran cover to cover.

11 a.m.

Sitting here at work
Not working/but thinking
Instead of Halloween
When I hear TAPS
Seeping through the typewriters
(like blood around bones?)
Making some wise remark
About cheerful music to work by
I'm shot down
By the lady next to me:
"It's Veteran's Day."
People are still typing though,
No moment of silence today
But business as usual, and
Although this lady looks almost sad
Uncle Sam wants you.

—Mary Ann Starus, 1971

21 Months, 24 Days

Dan Lavery (reviewer)

21 Months, 24 Days: A blue-collar kid's journey to the Vietnam War and back by Richard Udden
(CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2015)

"21 Months, 24 Days" by Richard Udden takes the reader from his enlistment, hoping to avoid becoming a grunt as an inexperienced eighteen-year-old kid, to an articulate curious soldier with unbounded energy, learning on the run. Expecting an easy two years working in a trade, he was assigned infantry and sent to Vietnam to fight in a jungle he accurately describes in such detail the reader is with him experiencing the toughest life imaginable. Most every chapter contains photographs that show the details he writes passionately about.

Because of his certificate in Machine Shop Technology, he hoped the Army would use that skill to assign him away from infantry, instead they made him a grunt. After advanced Infantry in Alabama, they sent him to NCO school in Anniston, Alabama, delaying his entry to Vietnam by five months! From Oakland Army Base in California, he boarded an airplane for Vietnam where he landed a day later. Assigned to A Company, First Cav Division, he looked around and felt he had "dropped down through a rabbit hole, to where there was no escape." He would be stuck here for a year at nearby Bien Hoa Air Force Airbase.

Standing guard was grueling as he had to do seven days a week at night, where trip flares were in place in case VC approached. Once they tripped a wire connected to a trip flare, the whole sky would light up. If there were others approaching he could send up a parachute flare to illuminate a larger area. Barbed wire weaved through the area to prevent crawling or running through. Many weapons existed to handle any size of force including claymore mines, machine guns and calling in jet aircraft.

His loneliness grew as he kept sending letters home but had not received any in return even though he knew they were writing. Much later, he was able to receive their mail and gifts. Soon, he was transferred to Fire Support Base called "Buttons," twenty miles from the Cambodian Border, with A Company known as "Ace High" where he received his own M16 rifle, helmet, and joined his fighting group of many experienced veterans. He was in awe of their appearance and proud to be a part of such a unit. Immediately he earned a nickname "Boston Bean" and became emotionally attached.

His first combat assault was when Ace High moved by helicopter into the jungle for about two weeks, where they would resupply soldiers in the field. They moved in, flying over a jungle with six Hueys at two thousand feet at one hundred twenty knots, landed, and dug a large hole to sleep near and store their machine guns, ammo, and equipment. Leeches, bees, and termites attacked where they hadn't sprayed insect repellent. This was living hell. In two weeks, they were back, having completed that mission.

In March 1970, Udden states that Nixon's invasion of Cambodia and the extension of the war was to not allow North Vietnam to take over South Vietnam because that would make us "look helpless and lose face in the world." Many contend though, by extending the war, Nixon's solution cost three million more Vietnamese lives and the lives of more than 20,000 Americans.

Soon, Udden was transferred to Firebase Candy for guard duty, seven miles from the Cambodian border. He was informed the VC used Cambodia for rest, food, ammunition, and relaxation just as our troops used the VIP center. But artillery constantly bombarded the area "to soften up the VC and NVA soldiers just over the Cambodian border." The noise bothered him so much he wanted a transfer to door gunner on a Huey. Soon, they moved out of Candy to find action near the Cambodian border.

Udden was selected for Combat Leadership Training and even spoke with his family using a ham radio link that picked up his sagging spirits like "standing on the moon." The rainy season was far more annoying than the heat of the sun.

Everyone liked Steve from California who was married just before Vietnam, meaning he was not to do combat. Their Colonel was replaced by another whom the men despised for his annoying new orders that exposed them to more danger. Udden later saw a VC up close while foolishly reading a book on patrol. Both dropped to the ground. He felt vulnerable and angry at himself.

In his first real firefight, a few days later while in the jungle in single file, VC machine gun fire hit the group. Dave was shot in the stomach and a Huey took him away. Udden changed that day. It hurt him personally and he felt the need for revenge of his military family. He recalled Biblical support for an eye for an eye retaliation in the Old Testament. Three more men were killed shortly afterwards. When a howitzer sent a shell into their midst three more were hurt badly. He received a promotion to Specialist 4 and made Fire Team leader. A few months later, Udden was promoted to sergeant.

While walking on patrol, someone tripped a wire tied to a grenade in an artillery shell, throwing him in the air with shrapnel hitting Steve in a thigh while he went down. No Medivac could reach there, nor could volunteers, despite hours trying. Steve's death deeply affected Udden.

After his Army life, he married, had two children, and is a retired Control Systems Engineer. He attended a reunion with many of his war pals, visited Steve's family, and honored the dead at the Vietnam Wall. His life stands as a tribute to many who served in our most controversial war.

Dan Lavery graduated Annapolis, navigated a Navy jet, was carrier qualified, earned his NAO wings in Florida, and then a ship to Vietnam. He resigned, turned peace activist, joined VVAW, and became a civil rights lawyer for the UFW, the ACLU, and private civil rights practice. His memoir, "All the Difference," describes his change from a pawn in the military to a crusader for justice.

Homage to Viet Vets

12,000 seasons the Globe has cast off
since Homer's chanting revealed
Achilles and Odysseus' proud boasts at Ilium.
Actual combat was left to others.

Not that long a time ago,
Whitman and Melville, Whittier and Dickinson
composed their stanzas, carrying to our hearts
the horrors of the North and of the South.
They were civilians.

In Flanders Fields, poet warriors tell of Hell,
on muddy pages in freezing trenches.
Officers all, not of the ranks.
Enlisted men's precinct, a Christmas Truce in
no-man's land, wrapped in laughter,
shared cigarettes, and a sort of soccer game.

Worldwide war-making movers and shakers succeed.
Carrying many wounds, many pages,
GI authors returned from the four corners,
disillusioned, angry, not yet widely dissenting,
but …….

…….. during decades of war, in a world in a jungle
between two vast oceans, citizens of
Vietnam humbled invaders from the Old World and the New.
Lives against fearsome machines, tinted poisons,
provided comprehension for conscripts sent
to humiliate and destroy.

Those that escaped body bags
rejected diabolical freedom to
participate in massacres.
Feeling the strength of personal pulsing humanity,
abandoning their mandate defiantly despite
outraged howling from home,
soldiers at last refusing
the role of murderous brigands
they were beguiled into,
trained and commanded to.

We veterans of earlier wars, our secret ghosts
rustling in the background,
tainted as we had been by
that monster of Deceit,
Patriotism !,
admire wintry declarations of honor,
understand power's denunciation
returned military decorations bestow.

Veterans of Vietnam,
for all time you give the lie to
Pro Patria Mori.*

* ancient Latin, "to die for one's country."

—Jay Wenk

Nothing Ever Dies

Steve Krug (reviewer)

Nothing Ever Dies by Viet Thanh Nguyen
(Harvard University Press, 2016)

"As a Gook, in the eyes of some, I can testify that being remembered as the other is a dismembering experience, what we can call a disremembering. Disremembering is not simply the failure to remember. Disremembering is the unethical and paradoxical mode of forgetting at the same time as remembering, or, from the perspective of the other who is disremembered, of being simultaneously seen and not seen." - Nothing Ever Dies

This is a book about how memories of war are modified to suit different political and cultural motives. There has been a constant struggle of how we remember wars, especially ones as divisive as our war on southeast Asia. Nguyen covers how all aspects of our culture (Nguyen calls them Memory Industries) are used to attempt to modify what happened and why, from a perspective I found quiet refreshing.

I had just finished reading "Race and Reunion" by David W. Blight, a book that covers how our own civil war was purposefully recast in a historical context, to justify in loftier terms why the South fought the war. I mention this as another example of how memories are reworked to suit certain interests.

I was hesitant to review this book for the VVAW's *The Veteran* as Nguyen is dismissive of the motto "Honor the warrior, not the war," but I felt that other VVAW members, as myself, could handle that criticism and appreciate the whole of the book.

Ken Burns has a film coming out in the fall which deals with the war. After reading "Nothing Ever Dies" I will view it through a slightly different lens. If it is yet another attempt to get past the "Vietnam syndrome," so we can reconcile ourselves to militarism, then we have learned nothing from war and can be sure that future generations will fight more wars, only to have their memories of them modified, and on and on.

"All wars are fought twice, the first time on the battlefield, the second time in memory." - Nothing Ever Dies

Steve Krug is an equally proud of being a member of VVAW and a conscientious objector.

Hue 1968

Jack Mallory (reviewer)

Hue 1968: A Turning Point of the American War in Vietnam by Mark Bowden
(Atlantic Monthly Press, 2017)

I just finished Bowden's "Hue 1968," and I wanted to give it a quick review. Outstanding. An often microscopically, and brutally, detailed account of the taking and re-taking of Hue, incorporating the experiences of American and Vietnamese troops, and Vietnamese and other-country civilians as well. The book incorporates the experiences of a wide range of individuals with a variety of different roles in the battle, and is extremely well-referenced.

The level of combat detail can be uncomfortably close to combat porn, but Bowden's purpose is to show the horrific effects of the battle on all those involved, combatants and non-combatants alike. And, as importantly, to show the chains of decision-making on both sides that led to the combat and its outcome.

Bowden is unsparing in his criticism of Westmoreland and other Americans of high rank in misunderstanding the nature of threat both before and during the fighting in the city—especially in Westmoreland's insistence in concentrating on a (false) threat to Khe Sanh. He is also honestly critical of the mistakes of the NVA high command in the planning and outcome of the battle, while still treating Tet, and the battle for Hue more particularly, as a political victory for the North both in Vietnam and in the US.

The book is unique in its focus on the importance, and bravery, of the press in getting a realistic picture of the fighting to the American public, in the face of military misreporting of what was actually going on. Bowden gives the first account I've read of the context of Cronkite's trip to Vietnam and his eventual conclusions and report on the situation of the war after Tet.

The final chapter of "Hue 1968" is a sincere accounting of the long-term effects of the fighting on the military and civilians in Hue, and an assessment of its historical meaning.

Bowden is grimly vivid in his portrayal of the physical and moral injuries to combatants, especially American troops:

> "To me the way they were used, particularly the way their idealism and loyalty were exploited by leaders who themselves had lost faith in the effort, is a stunning betrayal. It is a lasting American tragedy and disgrace."

> "The Americans I interviewed had opinions too various to be summarized, but three major themes predominated: Most (but not all) were proud of having served; Nearly all were angry over the betrayal of their youthful idealism, mostly at American leaders who sent them to fight a war that was judged unwinnable from the start; and All felt sorrow for the friends they lost and the horror the war inflicted on everyone involved, particularly because, for most (but not all), it appears that the death and suffering served no purpose."

He also treats at some length the effects of Tet/Hue on American politicians and on the anti-war movement.

Of what might be called long-term "lessons learned," Bowden says, among other things:

> "From the perspective of nearly half a century, the Battle of Hue and the entire Vietnam War seem a tragic and meaningless waste. So much heroism and slaughter for a cause that now seems dated and nearly irrelevant. The whole painful experience ought to have (but has not) taught Americans to cultivate deep regional knowledge in the practice of foreign policy, and to avoid being led by ideology instead of understanding."

Jack Mallory is a long-time VVAW member.

Mary's Mosaic

John Ketwig (reviewer)

Mary's Mosaic: The CIA Conspiracy to Murder John F. Kennedy, Mary Pinchot Meyer, and Their Vision for World Peace by Peter Janney
(Skyhorse Publishing, 2016)

When he was just a little boy, Peter Janney's best playmate was a kid named Michael Meyer, whose mother had gone to Vassar with Peter's mom. The families were close. Unfortunately, one afternoon Michael and his brother tried to run across a busy Washington, DC intersection. The brother made it, but Michael was hit by a car and killed. Michael's mom was a very attractive and accomplished woman, an artist, and a very devoted peace activist. Her uncle had been appointed head of the US Forest Service by his friend President Teddy Roosevelt, and her sister was married to the executive editor of the *Washington Post*, Ben Bradlee. Mary had been married to another anti-war activist named Cord Meyer, but somewhere along the line his core beliefs had changed and he had become a CIA agent. After a while, their divergent views led Mary to divorce Cord.

Mary Pinchot Meyer had been an acquaintance of John Kennedy since college. They were neighbors in Georgetown, Mary was rumored to be a friend of the First Lady, and they all met often at parties and dinners involving Washington's most prestigious and colorful personalities. Mary was a Washington socialite. Over time, she became JFK's mistress and confidant, and probably the love of his life. The President was a world-class womanizer, but his relationship with Mary Meyer was far more than just sexual. White House staff members and colleagues felt that she was influencing him to abandon his cold-war ideas and look for paths to world peace and rapprochement with both the Soviet Union and Cuba. Of course, many of the top people in the CIA and military were appalled at such thinking. After her death, it was discovered that Mary was in close touch with Timothy Leary, and there are indications she turned the president on to marijuana, and possibly even LSD.

Certainly, Kennedy's attitude toward war in general, and nuclear war in particular, was changing drastically. When JFK issued NSAM-263, a confidential order to pull 1,000 Americans out of Vietnam by the end of 1963, and most of those remaining by the end of 1965, the Joint Chiefs of Staff and military leaders in Vietnam ignored the order, then delayed its implementation. (The US did not officially have combat troops in-country at that time, although some special forces "advisors" were patrolling with the South Vietnamese army). Kennedy's commencement address at American University in June of 1963 was a landmark event, as he stated that America's position in future world affairs would be to seek possibilities for peace, and urging all the other nations around the planet to do the same, and to believe peace was actually possible. On July 25, the first Limited Test Ban Treaty with the Soviets was announced, and the warmongers were apoplectic.

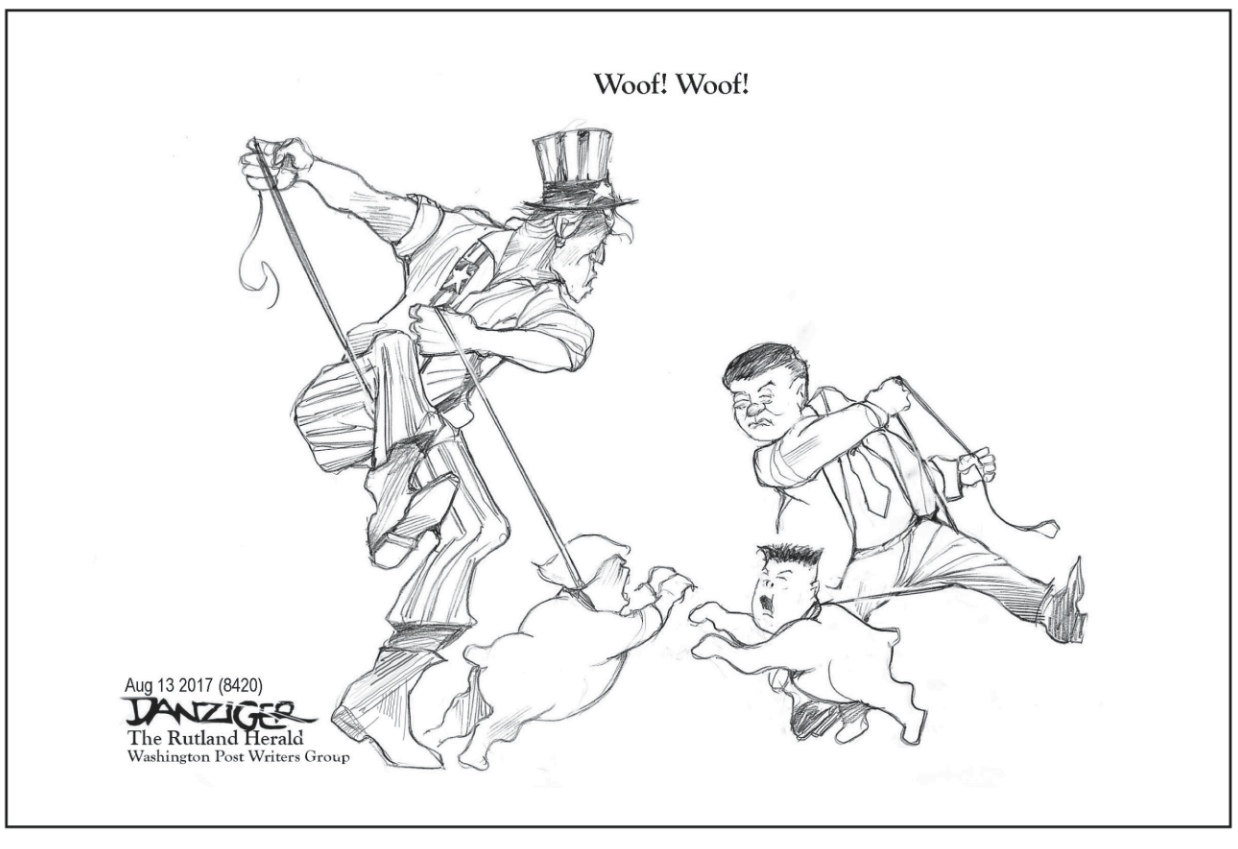
On November 21, 1963, JFK told Assistant Press Secretary Malcolm Kilduff, "Vietnam is not worth another American life," and "after I come back from Texas, that's going to change," referring to the military's pressure to increase our country's involvement in Vietnam. The next day, at Parkland Hospital in Dallas, Kilduff was the person who officially announced that the president was dead.

Mary Meyer was outraged. She knew all the top people in the CIA and many in the government and the military, and she recognized the signs that the president had been "eliminated" to keep his policies from happening. She was not at all reluctant to express that opinion. She named names and wondered aloud who had been involved. When the Warren Commission's report was released, she realized it was a blatant cover-up and turned up the volume. Mary Meyer was too well-known and respected in Washington, and her behavior was not at all appreciated in the halls of power. On October 12, 1964, she went for her usual long walk along the C & O canal towpath near Georgetown. She was shot twice and died immediately. A poor and timid black man was arrested and tried for the murder, but no one was ever convicted of the crime.

Because Mary Meyer had been a close family friend, Peter Janney became interested in the case. His father had been a high-ranking CIA official, and a close friend of Mary's ex-husband, Cord Meyer, and other top-level CIA spooks and assassins. "Mary's Mosaic" is the story of Janney's investigation, and the many pieces that began to come together like colorful bits of stone in a mosaic. Ultimately, the author discovered that his own father had played a role in both the assassination of the president, and probably the murder of Mary Meyer!

I buy a lot of books. Far too often, I read fifty or a hundred pages and set them aside for another day that never comes. I enjoy some books, learn from others, and sometimes I will appreciate a book just because it is well-written, a fine example of the art of written communication. Once in a great while I find a book that hits all three targets dead center, and "Mary's Mosaic" is one of those books. This is a page-turner, an edge-of-your-seat expose that will keep you up late at night with its amazing revelations. Certainly, the assassination of John F. Kennedy was the crime of the 20th century, and as more information is uncovered it is damned likely that we would never have seen Vietnam if JFK had not been eliminated. The debate continues. "Mary's Mosaic" is thoroughly researched and documented, with 86 pages of appendices, end notes, and bibliography to convince the skeptics. What's special about this book is its personal focus, and the author's obvious amazement, as he discovers the secrets of people he has known since childhood. You've got to wonder how many children growing up in the suburbs of Washington, DC today will someday discover that their parents or family friends were involved in all manner of skullduggery. You can bet that very few of them will tell their stories as well as Peter Janney has done. Highly recommended.

John Ketwig is a lifetime member of VVAW, and the author of "...and a hard rain fell: A G.I.'s True Story of the War in Vietnam."



A Vietnam Era Chicago Story

Joe Miller (reviewer)

Remembering Gage Park by William P. Shunas
(Xlibris, 2010)

Halfway into this great little book, Vietnam enters the picture with the assassination of JFK. The first half sets the table with a detailed description of the main characters in the context of a particular neighborhood on the Southwest side of Chicago from the early 1950s to the mid-1960s.

There are descriptions of ball games in the alleys (before they were paved), when foul balls were hit into the yards of angry neighbors. There was a "prairie" in Gage Park (as there was in Austin on the far West Side). This was undeveloped land that was a place to escape and make up stories... that is, before the developers came in and began construction. There is a Catholic elementary school and a public elementary school in the neighborhood, and there were tensions between the students – no one knew exactly why.

The story is told by "Mike" in the first person. He details what happened in his neighborhood and to his friends and family during a period of major change. Mike and "Connor," who would become his best friend, experienced these changes in early episodes, from the simple things like Mayor Daley finally paving the alleys (only in neighborhoods that had "clout"), to learning to relate to kids from the "colored" neighborhoods in sports contests. There were high school romances and fights between students from rival schools.

There were changes coming to the neighborhood in the form of "Negroes" or "colored" moving in beyond "their place". Overt racism among the neighbors was reflected in Mike's family, and even with Connor. Through it all, Mike and Connor remain friends.

By late 1965, racial divisions intensify with news about Watts. According to Mike, "If the Negro people were upset about the riots, white people in places like Gage Park were afraid of being victims of Negro violence...People were picking sides. Many of my neighbors were appalled by the use of dogs and water cannons against civil rights protesters."

Vietnam comes into play soon after their graduation from high school, especially after the assassination of Kennedy in 1963. Mike and Connor hear about friends who are already "over there" (they weren't sure where "there" was). By 1965, Connor decides he wants to enlist and go to Vietnam to "stop the commies". He and Mike discuss and debate this. In the end, Connor went off to the Army and Mike suffered a sports injury that kept him out.

Mike was soon involved in another "war," when, in 1966, Dr. King announced he was going to lead a civil right march in Gage Park at Marquette Park. The neighbors were split on this, with some folks walking out of church when a Catholic priest spoke about the need for civil rights. People were planning a huge response to King's "invasion" of their territory.

Mike describes the uproar at the park when King was hit with a brick and the racist slurs increased in intensity. The KKK was there, as were the Nazis, who, according to Mike, recruited a large following that day. "Not long after the marches in Marquette Park and Gage Park, the mayor [Daley] got a court injunction... The marchers bypassed the injunction by having a march in the suburb of Cicero where they met with more hostility." (141).

This novel is really a march through history as told by a person of our generation, the so-called Vietnam Generation. Connor trained in the Airborne and got orders to Vietnam. Mike went to work on the dock at a factory. One year later, Connor returns to the neighborhood minus his right arm. "Had a little accident in the Nam," he said, "I've got to shoot my free throws left-handed now." (147)

Connor's emotional distance from Mike becomes a part of the story. In 1968, after Dr. King and Bobby Kennedy were killed, Connor opens up about what happened in Vietnam. He got shot trying to save his buddy, "this black guy from Georgia…..I would have gladly given my life for that nigger," Connor says, "And the bastard didn't make it." (152) From this point on, Connor deteriorated.

Then, Mike's younger brother Mark surprises everyone by becoming involved in anti-war organizing. Early on he had supported the war against the "commies". Now, he wanted to "stop the damn war." To top it off, according to Mike, his little brother was now dating a black girl, after having been involved the in the demonstrations against King in 1966!

Connor eventually gets connected with other Vietnam veterans in a rap (discussion) group, and begins to climb out of his hole. But, too soon, after a family and more great things in Connor's life, Vietnam came to bite him in the ass in the form of Agent Orange poisoning.

Mike and Connor had experienced great transformations in their neighborhood and in their personal lives. Mike was still there for Connor and his family at the end, and life went on...a little emptier, a little sadder.

This is a story with depth, with heart, with compassion and sadness…. and resistance to the lesser angels inside each of us.

Joe Miller is a Navy veteran, 1961-68. Naval Security Group, 1961-64. USS Ticonderoga (CVA14), 1964-66. HELTRARON 8, 1966-68. He is a VVAW National Board Member.

Ken Burns' "Vietnam": A Legacy for War as a "Noble Cause"

RG CANTALUPO (REVIEWER)

If Ken Burns' "Vietnam" was meant to promote "healing and reconciliation," the first two episodes only caused this (and many other) combat veteran nausea and anger at the continued perpetration of negative myths and corporate/Pentagon-promoted mistruths to kill future anti-war dissent.

If "Vietnam" is to become our national "narrative" and legacy, whose primary purpose and intent seems to be to "steal" our story as Vietnam Veterans Against the War and Veterans for Peace, then my only regret is to not have another lifetime to dispel its dangerous, ignoble perspective.

There's a reason James Koch and the Bank of America bankrolled the project—let's keep the 10 plus other foundations, families, etc. out of the discussion until I can fact-check their motivations—and that's to promote "The Noble Cause" doctrine which helps enable the Pentagon to continue perpetual wars: Communism is bad; God is on our side; and, we sent our soldiers to Vietnam to stop a "civil war" between the North and the South. Wrong!

To compare Vietnam's struggle for independence as a civil war, is like comparing the American Independence fighters battling the British and Royalists to a civil war. 80-90% of the Vietnamese people would've voted for Ho Chi Minh if the agreed upon election would've been held, so the notion that we got into the war to stop a Communist takeover is a biased reading of history. And to pretend that Vietnam would become, or was, a proxy for China, belies an unacceptable ignorance of Vietnam's long history of fighting China to maintain its independence.

But the key to understanding the Burns-Koch-Bank of America perspective is through the selection and narratives of the talking heads.

"Vietnam" opens with the voice of Karl Marlantes, a gung ho Marine combat officer, famous for "Matterthorn" and "What It Is Like to Go to War," where he espouses how exhilarated he felt killing a man and/or winning a battle—something I never came close to feeling as a combat soldier. Exhilaration came in the lull of battle when I, and my buddies, could thank our lucky stars we were still alive. To tell a new, young generation of video-game warriors and virtual reality killers that in real life killing is exhilarating is at best a moral malaise, and at worse a sociopathic character flaw.

And to invoke Marlantes at the beginning, essentially the introduction, bookends the point of view they want to drive home.

Marlantes is also the poster child for two other nefarious myths that Burns wants to portray: the alienated veteran who never speaks about the war because he did such horrific things he can't talk about them, or because no one would understand and might shame him for his actions. And the myth that everyone during the sixties and seventies saw Vietnam veteran in negative terms, i.e. "baby killers."

The intent behind this is to kill or diminish dissent for future wars. We should honor the exhilarated, lonely killer because God was on his side and he was killing communists, to do otherwise is unpatriotic.

But Marlantes is an anomaly among Vietnam Veterans. We talked all the time about our war experiences. We gave speeches, organized protests, wrote newsletters, shared our stories at Winter Soldier. We created talk groups to purge our demons and our guilt. And we did these acts of moral cleansing and reconciliation because they helped titrate our night terrors and numerous other ailments the VA didn't want to hear about. And we talked so loud and for so long about our PTSD and our Agent Orange diseases that PTSD was put into the "Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders," and Agent Orange became a medical diagnosis.

John Musgrave, another talking head, adds "fear" and "hate" to The Noble Cause mantra. He was terrified of the Vietnamese—they were gook commies so they had to be "feared." If they were like us, I guess he couldn't have killed or fought against them.

This undercuts the many acts of kindness I witnessed by my fellow soldiers, medics, and officers. I rarely saw "pure hate" from a combat soldier. Moments of pure anger and grief when one of our friends got killed, but what we mostly hated was the war, not the people.

The civil war "myth" is perpetrated by a Vietnamese talking head whose father was an official for the French. Her sister joined Ho Chi Minh's army and this is meant as an example of how families were divided like in our own civil war. The problem here is that a Vietnamese working for the French is akin to the French working for the Nazis during World War II. After the French and its allies overthrew the Nazis, many of them were shot as traitors. So, the moral and historical equivalency is misguided at best.

As this is an abbreviated critique, (I've only seen the first two episodes) I'd like to end on this note: We—VVAW—changed history and ended the war, not alone of course, but we were the vanguard. Vietnam was a draftee war; in 1968-70, 60-80% of the combat soldiers were draftees who for the most part could care less about Communism, or flag, or country. And over 60% of the causalities were suffered by draftees. We weren't groupies of the "noble cause" band. We just wanted to survive our tours. And when the draftees AND enlisted men started to refuse to fight, along with millions of us and others marched in protest, our government was forced to negotiate an end.

That is our legacy and what we should be proud of. We knew the war was wrong, that our government was lying to the populace, and few of us believed there was anything to win. This is not a question of could we have won. There was nothing to win. And the wound we carry is knowing that so many young men and women died needlessly to promote this "ignoble cause," the American War in Vietnam.

RG Cantalupo, (Ross Canton), is a poet, playwright, filmmaker, novelist, and director. His work has been published widely in literary journals in the United States, England, and Australia. He served in the 25th Infantry Division as an RTO for an infantry company from 1968-69 and received three purple hearts and a Bronze Star with a combat V for Valor under fire.

Soldiers in Revolt

Alan Stolzer (reviewer)

Soldiers in Revolt: GI Resistance During the Vietnam War, by David Cortright
(Haymarket Books, 2005)

Who could serve their oath to the Constitution better than those who may very well turn their backs on planned or actual Imperial war/occupation and face, instead, domestic responsibilities provided by one of the two least favored candidates in history, all too indicative of mass displeasure?

Nat Turner has been in the news recently; a long-awaited film released to conflicting review. No, I haven't seen it (yet) but will before long.

This book isn't about Turner, although he scared the hell out of a significant amount of people (still does), but it is about people, many years later, who did what he did - revolted.

The parallel point(s) are that those who rebel do what they must at a given time during political and social development.

It is done, uncompromisingly, since it must, without retreat, without endless thought process, but with terrible, everlasting conviction and consequence (Turner cannot nor need not supply italics here or anywhere else).

Vietnam, for instance, still tears at the tender membrane of US conscience. No matter how long ago, its revealed horrors keep many awake to this day with more than a toothache.

War vet David Cortright, author of this diary of dissent, documents atrocity, grief, and resistance through dedicated and incisive reporting without invitation of sympathy or artificial remorse usually available in the soup kitchen of hypocrisy.

Who rebelled (in arms), when, how and why are depicted clearly as well as keeping an eye to history many would choose not to consult. The essence of people becoming subjects of rebellion, previously undreamed of, reminds us what history can do to or for us all.

What good is it some might ask?

After all, it was another time and generation indicating the question of timelessness could be inconvenient to address.

It isn't.

What it is, is struggle produced under the harshest circumstances that could, at history's beck and call, be just around the corner, reasons provided by uncaring leadership, carrying out distorted will that only points subordinates to hell.

Consider the following: Who would think aircraft carriers could be scuttled by angry, young sailors, many from tidy, American homes, unused to disobedience but now ready to rebel heedless of cost. Knowledge of Vietnam's corrupt mission and their part in it created opposition to its poison.

Enlightenment and epiphany became answer to slaughter proscribed by Imperial design in refusal to carry out twisted mandate but confront it instead. Freedom, after all, chooses different roads from time to time.

Learn about "fragging" - the killing of officers and non-commissioned officers who ignored symbolic warning being disarmed fragmentation grenades placed on their bunks by enraged troops dramatically transformed by unthinking command that endangered them unnecessarily.

Or troops in mutiny, non-caring of threatened punishment but providing threats of their own toward those who compromised them.

Other tactics included units who had communicated with the Vietnamese, sending word they wouldn't engage but rested beyond battle perimeter and smoked marijuana instead.

Interestingly, it wasn't draftees who displayed such anger and intent but enlisted troops who thought they were headed for patriotic duty in Vietnam only to have their souls pawned by those needy of career boost and perverse sense of duty.

Cortright covers the numerous anti-war, anti-command newsletters, newspapers and other publications that erupted throughout conflict created by combatants themselves fed up with political aims of the US in Indochina.

The spirit of rebellion is faithfully recorded by title, place and time. This, after all, was no fluke, no historical burp but determined rank and file resistance at its most fierce and dedicated having wildfire effect.

The effect on the military was sobering to say the least. Measures were taken by command to suppress discontent by increasing discipline or muzzling printed and spoken resistance. Soon some units were disarmed in order to prevent more outbreaks.

However, none were ever completely stamped out.

The Pentagon noted it well, alarmed insofar as "By every conceivable indicator, our army that now remains in Vietnam is in a state approaching collapse, with individual units avoiding or having refused combat, murdering their officers and noncommissioned officers, drug-ridden, and dispirited where not near mutinous." This from a well-circulated memorandum by Col. Robert Heinl, ahead in his field it would seem.

A constant issue, central to Cortright's review were black troops, being most affected and, though alliances were formed with whites, remained victims of racism throughout hostilities. The Army, especially, was in danger of being torn apart. A war within a war was fought with few ready for the consequences.

Make no mistake - these rebellions were critical part of a larger theater of change involving much of the world during the period, its place in this or any other era assured no matter how time and brainwashed memory may act to muffle it.

Cortright is meticulous as he records troop-worker alliances, fair housing efforts for the military, successful and failed attempts at unity within ranks, more troop dissent during World War II and Korea and changes in military attitude as per pre-Vietnam War thinking are all well recorded.

Detail, however, can be friend or foe as the book tends to monotone lacking personal insight or interviews. Individual memories are absent not having integrated the stream of the book with human change of pace. Though thousands were forced into crime by those who would make them criminals the fuller human aspect is missing. Dryness results.

Nevertheless, the book's motion is contagious, unfrozen in time. This serves as lesson now brought more clearly to the stage by current events.

Who could serve us better in times to come when more belligerent class lines form as perhaps never before?

Who could serve their oath to the Constitution better than those who may very well turn their backs on planned or actual Imperial war/occupation and face, instead, domestic responsibilities provided by one of the two least favored candidates in history, all too indicative of mass displeasure?

A potential alliance between our troops and us is truly something to think about if not to act upon. Not so distant memories echo from the horrors of Vietnam that "Soldiers in Revolt" reminds us of so well.

Who knows? The Second Amendment may yet come in handy.

Nat Turner doesn't rest so easily.

Alan Stolzer was in the US Navy: 10/61-6/63. After service, he spent 4 years working Western Europe/Mexico learning there were alternatives to Capitalism. He is a full-time playwright and has written quite a few plays written concerning the military.

Renunciation

John Ketwig (reviewer)

Renunciation: My Pilgrimage from Catholic Military Chaplain, Vietnam Hawk, and Medal of Honor Recipient to Civilian Warrior for Peace by Charles J. Liteky
(self-published posthumously, all proceeds go to the Charles J. Liteky and Judith Balch Liteky Trust, San Francisco, CA, 2017)

Charlie Liteky was inspired to write his life's story by Judy, his loving wife. Unfortunately, neither of them lived to see that story in book form, sitting proudly on a bookstore shelf. Close friends saw to it that this hugely important book would be published as a memorial to both Charlie and Judy. It is that, and much more.

To anyone who knew them, the Litekys were inspiring folk. For those who might not be familiar, he was a Catholic chaplain in Vietnam, and when he went out with a patrol one day, they were ambushed. Despite being wounded twice, Charlie crawled out under heavy fire and dragged twenty wounded men to safety, plus performed final rites for many more. For that action, he was awarded the Medal of Honor. After returning from Vietnam, he left the military, and then he left the priesthood. He was thinking, evaluating his core beliefs about life, service to others, conscience, and the nature of patriotism. He met Judy, a former nun, and they were married. Working in southern California, they began to hear stories from refugees who had escaped Central America, and Charlie became concerned that our country was creating another Vietnam-style conflict in Nicaragua and El Salvador. He went to see for himself, and was horrified by what he found. In 1986, he wrote a letter to President Reagan explaining his views, and left the letter and his Medal of Honor at the base of the Vietnam memorial. No other recipient of the Medal of Honor had ever returned it, and today, Charlie's medal and letter are on display in the Smithsonian Institution Museum of American History. Soon after giving up his medal, Charlie took part in the Veterans Fast for Life on the steps of the Capitol. He became an activist, speaking out and putting his body on the line against the death and destruction our government's policies were raining down upon so many areas of the world. He was imprisoned, but never silenced. "Renunciation" is Charlie's story, in his own words. It is an inspiring tale of one man's conversion from a militarist to a peacemaker. He describes the great moral dilemma of leaving the priesthood, the huge joy he found in Judy, the love of his life, and many anti-war friends and colleagues. "Renunciation" is a travelogue of one simple man's life, the landscapes and intersections he encountered along the way, and the tremendous mental and spiritual transitions he experienced as his intrinsic morality bumped up against our country's cruel and pointless militarism. Renunciation is a very special witness by a very special and important man.

A highly-recommended read.

John Ketwig is a lifetime member of VVAW, and the author of "...and a hard rain fell: A G.I.'s True Story of the War in Vietnam."

McNamara's Mistake

Hamilton Gregory

One morning in the summer of 1967, I was among about 100 men at the Armed Forces induction center in Nashville. It was the height of the Vietnam War, and I had volunteered for the Army. A sergeant walked into the room and announced that all of us would leave soon to begin training in Fort Benning, Georgia. Then he asked, "Is anyone here a college graduate?"

I raised my hand, and he motioned me to follow him. He took me down a hallway to a bench where I was introduced to a young man I'm going to call Johnny Gupton, to protect his privacy. Gupton was also assigned to Fort Benning. "I want you to take charge of this man," the sergeant told me. "Go with him every step of the way." He explained that Gupton could neither read nor write, and would need help in filling out paperwork when we arrived at Benning. Then he added: "Make sure he doesn't get lost. He's one of McNamara's Morons."

I had never heard the term, and I was surprised that the sergeant would openly insult Gupton. But I learned quickly that "McNamara's Morons" was a term that many officers and sergeants used to refer to thousands of low-I.Q. men like Gupton who were taken into the military under a program devised by Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara.

The sergeant handed me a sealed envelope that held my personnel records and Gupton's. I was instructed to give the package to the sergeants when I arrived at Fort Benning.

As we traveled by bus and by plane, I tried to make small talk with Gupton, but he didn't say much. I asked him what state he was from, but he didn't know. I later found out that he lived in Eastern Tennessee, in one of the Appalachian Mountains' isolated "poverty pockets." He was very thin – unhealthily thin. He knew nothing about the situation he was in. He didn't understand what basic training was about, and he didn't know that America was in a war. I tried to explain what was happening, but I could tell that he was still in a fog.

In basic training, he was virtually helpless. We had to make his bunk because he couldn't follow Army specifications. I tied his boots for him every morning until another trainee took the time to teach him the skill. He didn't know his left from his right, so he had trouble with basic commands like "left face" and "right face" and he had trouble with marching. When the sergeants screamed at him, he was terrified and confused.

On the rifle range, he was erratic and dangerous in handling his rifle – the sergeants feared he would accidentally shoot himself or someone else. Finally, he was put on permanent kitchen duty, cleaning and scrubbing in the mess hall all day. (Later, he was sent to Vietnam, and he survived because he was protected by a sergeant who gave him jobs away from combat. The sergeant was sympathetic because he had grown up with a sister whom he described as "mentally handicapped.")

A total of 5,478 low-I.Q. men died in the service, most of them in combat. Their fatality rate was three times as high as that of other G.I.s.

Why were Gupton and other low-aptitude men inducted? In 1966, the war in Vietnam began to heat up, and McNamara and President Lyndon Johnson found themselves short of men to fill the ranks. Johnson and McNamara could have drafted college students, but they didn't want to anger middle-class voters. They could have sent men from the National Guard and Reserves, but that, too, would have been politically unpopular.

There was one group of men who had been beyond the reach of the draft – those who had been disqualified because they failed the military's mental test. Desperate for warm bodies, Johnson and McNamara decided to induct the low-scoring men, whom Johnson referred to (in a secret White House tape) as "second-class fellows."

On October 1, 1966, McNamara started a program called Project 100,000, which lowered mental standards for 100,000 men each year. By the end of the war, McNamara's program had sent 354,000 "substandard" men to all branches of the armed forces. The Army got 71%, the Marine Corps 10%, the Navy 10%, and the Air Force 9%. Among the troops, these men were often known as McNamara's Morons, the Moron Corps or McNamara's Boys.

Military leaders – from William Westmoreland, the commanding general in Vietnam, to lieutenants and sergeants at the platoon level – viewed McNamara's program as a disaster. Because many of the Project 100,000 men were slow learners, they had difficulty absorbing necessary training. Because many of them were incompetent in combat, they endangered not only themselves but their comrades as well.

Barry Romo and his nephew Robert served in Vietnam at the same time. "I loved Robert like a brother," Barry Romo said. "We grew up together. He was only one month younger."

Barry was an infantry platoon leader in Vietnam in 1967-68, and he saw a lot of combat, winning a Bronze Star. During his tour, he learned that Robert had been drafted and was being trained at Fort Lewis, Wash., to be an infantryman, destined for Vietnam. Barry was alarmed because Robert was "very slow" and had failed the Army's mental test. But then came Project 100,000, lowering standards and making him subject to the draft. A host of people – his relatives, his comrades at Fort Lewis, his sergeants, his officers – wrote to the commanding general at Fort Lewis, asking that Robert not be sent into combat because, as one relative put it, "he would die."

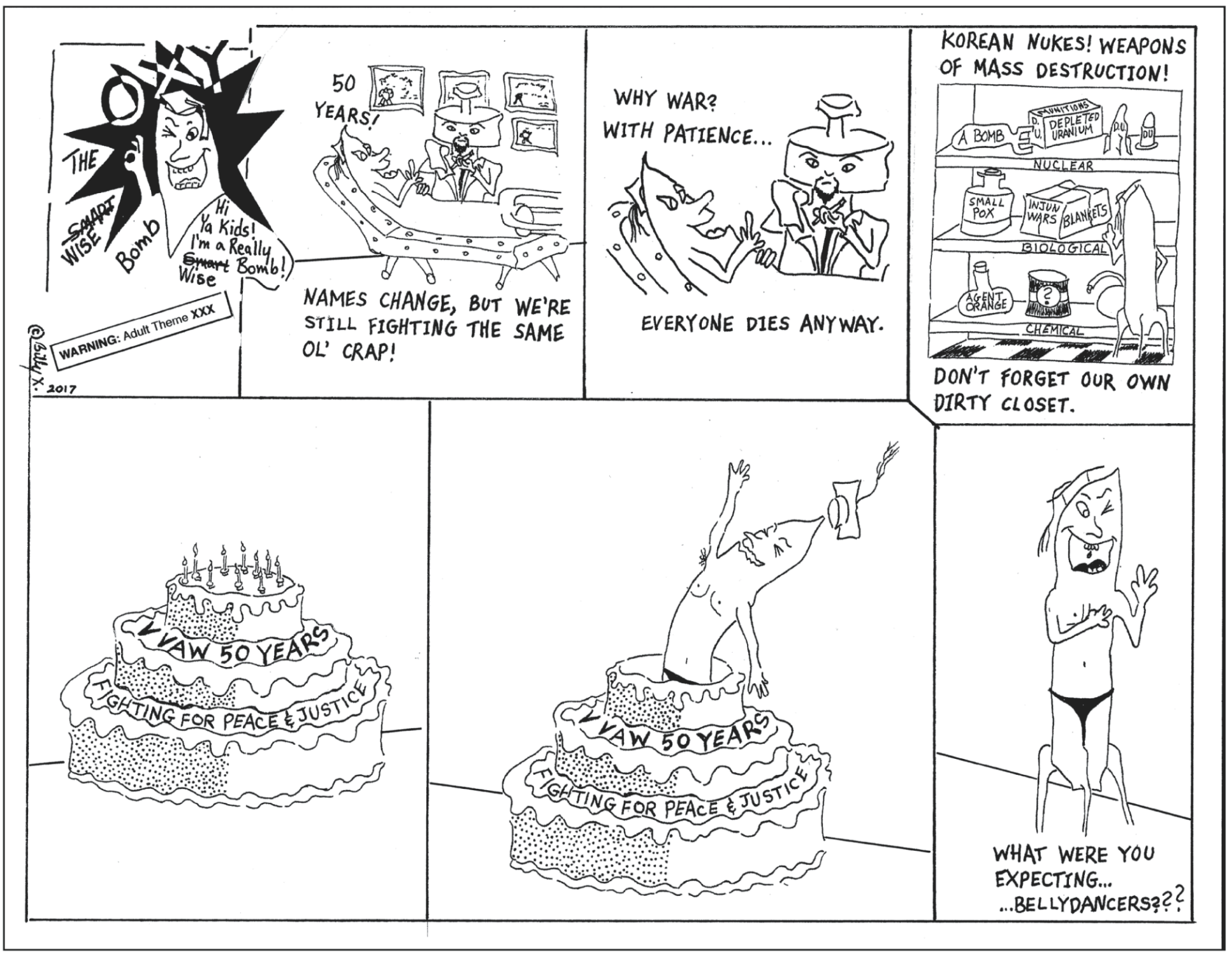
But the general turned down the request and Robert was sent to an infantry unit near the border of North Vietnam, one of the most dangerous combat areas. During a patrol, he was shot in the neck while trying to help a wounded friend. He did not die instantly, but heavy gunfire kept a medic from reaching him. "He drowned in his own blood," Barry said.

At the request of the family, Barry was given permission to leave Vietnam and accompany Robert's body home to Rialto, California. The aluminum coffin was sealed and draped with a flag, and the family was not allowed to view the remains. (It was Army policy to discourage or forbid viewing when a body was badly mutilated.) In a speech 42 years later, Barry Romo said that the family had never recovered from losing Robert: "His death almost destroyed us with anger and sorrow."

A total of 5,478 low-I.Q. men died in the service, most of them in combat. Their fatality rate was three times as high as that of other G.I.s. I knew some of these men at Fort Benning, and I was sickened and furious when I discovered their fate because they never should have been inducted, and they never should have been sent into combat.

As the war correspondent Joseph Galloway wrote, "The Good Book says we must forgive those who trespass against us – but what about those who trespass against the most helpless among us: those willing to conscript the mentally handicapped, the most innocent, and turn them into cannon fodder?"

Hamilton Gregory is the author of "McNamara's Folly: The Use of Low-I.Q. Troops in the Vietnam War."



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THE VETERAN
SECTION D
Volume 47, Number 2 Fall 2017

When Veterans Protested the Vietnam War

JAN BARRY

In 1967, I realized I wasn't the only soldier to oppose America's role in the conflict. An ad in the April 9, 1967, edition of *The New York Times* caught my attention and changed my life. "We appeal to North Vietnam, if they really want peace, to stop bombing the United States — or else get the hell out of Vietnam!" stated a group named Veterans for Peace in Vietnam. A Vietnam veteran myself, I recognized it as a tonic outburst of G.I. black humor, a cheeky comment on the reality of who was bombing whose homeland. It also convinced me that there was a role for me to play, as a veteran, in exposing what the American government was doing in Indochina.

Posted to Vietnam as an Army radio specialist, I celebrated my 20th birthday in Saigon in January 1963, a very drunk soldier in the United States Military Assistance Command Vietnam. Less than two years later, the Gulf of Tonkin "incident" happened. We were already waging war — when we weren't doing happy hours in bars from the Delta to Da Nang — under slick counterinsurgency slogans like "winning hearts and minds" and cynical unit slogans like "only you can prevent a forest" (motto of the Air Force missions spraying the countryside with chemical warfare herbicides). I'll admit — some of it was thrilling. I caught flights on Air Force C-123s skimming treetops and bush-pilot planes flown by my Army unit transporting Special Operations teams in and out of hush-hush places, with B-26 and T-28 bombers and assorted other airplanes and helicopters flitting around, all part of a strategy to "pacify" rice-farming regions and jungle forests potentially harboring elusive Vietcong guerrillas, under the guise of being "military advisers" to a government we had installed.

Our mission was to hold Communist China in check. We occupied old French Foreign Legion posts, contemptuous of the French for being defeated by Vietnamese. Yet we seldom controlled much beyond our bases. Things in Southeast Asia, I learned, were not as upstanding as portrayed in official pronouncements. Declining a military career, I resigned from the United States Military Academy, where I went after serving in Vietnam, intending to write an exposé of our secretive, bizarre little war in Southeast Asia. That project got snagged in a tangle of new revelations as the war mushroomed in 1965-66 into an assault on the scale of World War II campaigns.

Quitting a newspaper job in New Jersey, I moved to New York in early 1967, looking to join the emerging public debate over the war. Working as a file clerk at the New York Public Library and doing research for another stab at a book project, I read a news dispatch about the bombing of yet another Vietnamese village. I was incensed that the news item quoted a military spokesman saying this was a mistake, but didn't report that bombing villages was our strategy in Vietnam. So, I dashed off a dissenting letter to the editor, sent a furious letter of protest of our bombing campaign to one of my senators, Robert Kennedy, and wrote a blistering letter to Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara blasting the bombing of civilians and enclosed my war medals with the letter to emphasize my disgust.

And much against my small-town, patriotic, Republican upbringing in upstate New York, I joined a peace demonstration. The April 15, 1967, anti-war march to the United Nations plaza drew more than 100,000 people, including a large contingent of older, predominantly World War II and Korean War veterans wearing "Veterans for Peace" hats. I joined a small group of grim young men with a banner that read "Vietnam Veterans Against the War!"

That was the beginning of a movement of military veterans determined to speak out from personal experience about troubling battlefield tactics, strategies and national policies driving the war in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. In November 1967 our new group, Vietnam Veterans Against the War, placed an ad in *The New York Times*, titled "Viet-Nam Veterans Speak Out." Signed by 65 veterans of the Army, Air Force, Navy and Marines, the statement said in part: "We know, because we have been there, that the American public has not been

continued on next page

Thank You VVAW

JOE PETZEL

I was with the 3rd of the 5th Armored Cavalry, Vietnam, 1968 and 1969, stationed in I corp, near the DMZ. I was first a messenger, then a rear gunner on an armored personnel carrier. I returned home elated to be out of the insanity. I felt angry, full of rage, guilty, ashamed and depressed. It would take many years to realize I had depression and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. I knew that anything I was going through was minor compared to the evil I had been part of in that war. The people of Vietnam were going through so much more than I could ever imagine. I had so much guilt and shame over my participation in the war. When I was drafted, I wanted to serve my country. I believed all the lies about defending our freedom.

I'm so grateful for VVAW. I joined, eventually becoming regional coordinator for Northern Illinois and Iowa. My primary activities were in Chicago. We had a very active chapter, participating in many demonstrations in Chicago and around the country, speaking engagements, organizing vets, hosting a national VVAW conference along with many other activities. The time spent with other veterans in our daily anti-war work was wonderful, therapeutic and meaningful. It helped me make sense of what I had gone through in Vietnam. My rage was redirected at those politicians, generals and corporations responsible for our involvement in the war.

VVAW take over of the Nixon re-election headquarters in downtown Chicago. Joe Petzel, with the beard and glasses, seated next to the telephone.

My work with other veterans was a joyful experience. We created so much strength in our brotherhood. We stood tall in the face of organized hatred from the Chicago Police Department. The Red Squad, the "political" branch of the Chicago Police Department, followed, harassed, physically assaulted, used informants, and kept undercover files on many of us. We were veterans exercising our constitutional rights and were treated like traitors. Our strength and willingness to stand together in brotherhood meant so much to me. We were assisting in changing the consciousness of our country!

As the years have gone by, I uncovered the deep psychological/emotional wounds the war caused, and worked at healing. I realized that my participation in VVAW was such an important part of my ongoing recovery. The despair I came home with was changed by VVAW. The effects of that created the base for future healing. Without VVAW I wonder what my life would be like now.

Thank you VVAW. My life has been centered around bringing the ideals of peace, cooperation, compassion, justice and empathy to my chosen professions, education and clinical psychology. VVAW was the launching pad for these passions. From despair to a faith in changing the world, I thank you. Thank you, fellow vets, for your guidance, love, strength and brotherhood.

Thank you VVAW.

JOE PETZEL TAUGHT IN ALTERNATIVE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL FOR 13 YEARS. OVER THE LAST 30 YEARS, HE WAS IN PRIVATE PRACTICE, A CLINICAL DIRECTOR IN A NONPROFIT FAMILY CLINIC WHERE HE CREATED LOW FEE/NO FEE SERVICES FOR THE LOCAL COMMUNITY. HE TAUGHT GRADUATE LEVEL CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY COURSES AND FOUNDED A DOMESTIC VIOLENCE TREATMENT CENTER.

It Still Hurts

Jim Wohlgemuth

So today at Unity Church here in Nashville the pastor, John MacLean, led a remembrance of 1967, the fiftieth anniversary of The Summer of Love. The service was of music and trends and a lot of fun. Of course it started off with Scott MacKenzie's, "San Francisco," you know, don't forget "to wear a flower in your hair." He moved to other songs like Aretha Franklin's, "R-E-S-P-E-C-T" and "The Beat Goes On" by Sonny and Cher. There was a discussion of Hair and the band led us in singing "Aquarius/Let the Sun Shine In" and others. The joint was jumping.

But like '67 it was not all fun and frolic. He stopped to talk about Detroit in 1967 where over 40 African Americans (he reminded us that African Americans were called Negroes at the time) were killed by police and National Guard. He talked about the desperation that leads to riots. How can we blame rioters when desperation of injustice and poverty is overwhelming. He showed pictures of tanks in the streets and how could this happen in the streets of American cities.

He talked about the news and then Vietnam. I was OK for a while. He reminded us that we all listened to Walter Cronkite and got our news often from "Life" or "Look" Magazines. I was still OK. He said in 1967 the anti-war movement was getting going and that 11,000 young Americans were already dead and that more than 40,000 were yet to die along with the millions of Vietnamese. I was hanging on. Then a member of the congregation shouted out who was in Vietnam? John asked all Vietnam Vets to raise their hands and I glanced at my wife and saw her nod strength and I raised my hand and began losing it. I pulled my hand down and then raised it again and then some one asked us to stand up. No I could not, I would not. I was in tears by this point. A wonderful gentleman from behind tapped me on the shoulder and said "Thanks for your service." I could not speak and just flashed a peace sign as I nodded. The tears and emotion blocked the cheers from the congregation, why were they clapping?

In '67 Vietnam was only a lingering fear in the back of my mind as I graduated from high school and prepared to go off to Drexel Institute of Technology not realizing how totally unprepared I was. After an unsuccessful year at Drexel, I found myself forced by my Mom to visit a recruiter before the draft board caught up to me. Vietnam would grab me the summer of '69 when I joined the Westchester County LST 1167 and sailed into Da Nang. From there we went to Chu Lai, where on August 13th, 1969 Viet Cong rockets streaked through the sky and into the base causing us to go to general quarters and for me to wonder how any of this had happened. It was over in a half and hour. The next morning there ware several plumes of smoke but that was it. I had no more close encounters with violence until my last cruise. This time on the Point Defiance LSD 31 when, as a ready group of four ships, we headed toward the beach for a helicopter assault north of Hue. The LST in the group came under fire and we were ordered hard to port and got out of there while the cruiser Oklahoma City streaked by guns a blazing.

My brushes with danger were so minimal compared to the Army and Marines in-country yet here I was almost 50 years later still agonizing over Vietnam. After the Navy and college I worked in DC. A portion of that work was across Constitution Ave from the Vietnam Memorial. I would visit it often. The weight of the names on the wall would hit me hard. Why were they there and not standing next to me. Why was I not one of the names? Did I shirk my responsibility by joining the Navy to avoid the risk that these 58,000 plus took and lost?

Everyday at least once a day I am touched by my service in the Navy. It was not a positive. It is nothing I am proud of. And it is nothing I share unless asked. It is also something I am not personally ashamed of even though I am ashamed of the politicians that led us into that needless conflict to kill millions while killing 58,000 plus young American who should be grandfathers and grandmothers now.

I cried again today at church, knowing what I always have known. That I will never get over and get rid of Vietnam. And now realizing the youngsters who we continue to send into harms way and the tears they will shed for the rest of their lives.

God help us. All of us.

Jim Wohlgemuth, USN 1968 to 1972, graduated from Indiana University of Pa 1976, married 1977. He retired from the Federal Government in 2005 and retired from teaching 2014. He is a member of VVAW, VVA, & Veterans for Peace.

Remembering the Tonkin Gulf Yacht Club 50 Years Later

Al Wellman

Fifty years ago the US Navy established PIRAZ station off the coast of Nghệ An Province about fifteen miles east of the island of Hon Truan. For the next several years, a guided missile cruiser with a destroyer riding shotgun patrolled back and forth at twelve knots maintaining a Positive Identification Radar Advisory Zone to detect any North Vietnamese MiGs hiding among Navy aircraft returning to Yankee station aircraft carriers after air operations over North Vietnam.

The continental shelf around PIRAZ station was a good fish habitat which had sustained a population of Đàn seafarers for centuries. Although the Navy regarded the Đàn sailboats as North Vietnamese lookout posts carrying mines or screening torpedo boats waiting to attack patrolling warships, most were simply homes of three-generation families. Navy watchstanders scanning the boats with binoculars could determine each crew consisted of mother, father, children, and aging grandparents.

Like many Vietnamese, these unfortunate Đàn were simply trying to maintain their subsistence lifestyle on the battlefield of the industrialized world. When fishing conditions were good, hundreds of Đàn sailboats made PIRAZ station PPI radar scopes look as if someone had cast a handful of luminous salt over the screen. CIC personnel attempting to avoid collisions were overwhelmed by the number of radar contacts as the PIRAZ ships plowed through the clustered fishing boats at twelve knots. Most Đàn sailboats carried no lights, but I recall investigating a light dead ahead one night and discovering it was a Đàn standing on the bow of a sailboat holding a cigarette lighter over his head hoping to avoid being run down. Most of us made frequent course changes to avoid every boat we could see, but there were dark nights when our first visual contact was a Đàn sailboat bouncing along the side of the ship as we passed. A few senior officers would instruct their watchstanders to, "Maintain present course and speed. They are the North Vietnamese enemy, after all."

The Đàn had historically been perceived as outcasts by people living ashore. They may not have been our enemy fifty years ago, but a few years of dodging patrolling warships day and night may have converted them. As additional encouragement for the Đàn to vacate their fishing grounds, one cruiser captain decided to conduct a gunnery exercise for his 5-inch guns. To avoid the obvious implication that the Đàn sailboats were the target, the cruiser's motor whaleboat was launched to tow a floating target through the fishing fleet. Aside from their proximity to the gunnery target, the whaleboat crew was apprehensive about the prospect of an independent operation amongst the more numerous Đàn sailboats, but hoped the presence of two large warships would discourage retaliation.

Although Navy brass felt it confirmed the presence of North Vietnamese military observers aboard the Đàn sailboats, it may have been coincidence a MiG took off from Vinh shortly after the cruiser began firing. The cruiser promptly discontinued the gunnery exercise and held a steady course away from its whaleboat to keep the MiG in the engagement arc of the guided missile launcher and fire control radars. The destroyer followed to screen the cruiser. At a distance of a few miles, the warship silhouettes still seemed fairly close to the whaleboat crew. But during the distracting MiG encounter, the cruiser lookouts lost track of their proverbial whaleboat needle in the haystack of Đàn sailboats.

The MiG maneuvered around the maximum range of the cruiser's guided missiles for several minutes, but landed before the cruiser could launch a missile. The patiently waiting whaleboat crew was only vaguely aware of their peril in the gathering evening twilight until their signalman interpreted a flashing light message from the cruiser to its accompanying destroyer: "Can you see my whaleboat?"

The whaleboat crew promptly informed the cruiser of their bearing, and were recovered before darkness fell.

Subsequent collapse of oceanic fisheries has forced many Đàn to find work ashore, where they have largely been assimilated into local populations hopefully enjoying better health care, education, and government services. I wonder if any Đàn elders still tell stories of their encounters with the 7th Fleet Tonkin Gulf Yacht Club.

Al Wellman was a Guided Missile (GM) officer who stood Officer of the Deck (OOD) watches aboard a Navy cruiser in the Positive Identification RADAR Advisory Zone (PIRAZ) from 1970 to 1972.

When Veterans Protested the Vietnam War

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told the truth about the war or about Viet-Nam … We believe that true support for our buddies still in Viet-Nam is to demand that they be brought home (through whatever negotiation is necessary) before anyone else dies in a war the American people did not vote for and do not want."

McNamara privately shared our public dissent with President Johnson, it was later revealed. Yet combat missions and casualties continued to escalate. It would be another year before public opinion turned toward doubts about the war. Elected president with a promised peace plan, Richard Nixon ordered more bombing and an invasion of Cambodia.

We veterans played a major part in the roiling anti-war activism. As college campuses exploded in protest, outraged student veterans spoke out across the nation, appalled when four students were killed by the Ohio National Guard at Kent State University. Soldiers coming home joined veterans in mounting their own protests, embittered by horrific battlefield casualties, nightmarish atrocities and horrendous conditions at Veterans Administration hospitals. They also sought answers about a mysterious malady, later named Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder; pressed for better health care programs at the VA; and raised worries about health threats from exposure to Agent Orange. Bitter war stories burst out in poetry, short stories, novels, memoirs and testimony to Congress.

On national television, several hundred veterans flung war medals onto the steps of the Capitol in April 1971 during an encampment in Washington organized by Vietnam Veterans Against the War to protest the continuation of the fighting, which by then was over a decade old. Such anguished actions aimed to "search out and destroy the last vestige of this barbaric war," Navy Lt. John Kerry told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on behalf of the protesting veterans, so that Vietnam might come to mean "the place where America finally turned and where soldiers like us helped in the turning."

The following spring, in 1972, with the assistance of many Vietnam Veterans Against the War colleagues, Larry Rottmann, Basil T. Paquet and I published, as the editors of 1st Casualty Press, a poetry anthology that offered a G.I. outcry by veterans whose views had been dismissed in literary as well as political circles. "Forty years after its publication, 'Winning Hearts and Minds: War Poems by Vietnam Veterans' remains one of the most compelling, insightful and moving accounts of the American war in Vietnam," wrote the critic Adam Gilbert in the literary journal *War, Literature and the Arts* in 2013." 'Winning,' and the body of 'Vietnam war poetry' that it helped to establish, presented a searing critique of the war by those who had fought in it, a critique that continues to offer a valuable opportunity to understand and examine America's policies and attitudes toward Asia through the eyes of the men who implemented them."

In the public imagination, Vietnam veterans stand in contrast to anti-war protesters — at best, the maligned victims of government policy; at worst, willing accomplices to atrocities. But as I experienced firsthand, those stereotypes ignore the vital role that thousands of veterans played in the anti-war movement, bringing testimony and moral witness to bear against a disastrous military adventure.

Jan Barry, a founder of Vietnam Veterans Against the War, is an investigative journalist and the author of "A Citizen's Guide to Grassroots Campaigns."

Maggot Days

GERALD R. GIOGLIO

Author's note: This and future Maggot Days submissions on are part of a work-in-progress on the 1960s, especially the war years. Feedback or suggestions welcome on the VVAW Facebook page.

Induction Station

I, _____, do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; and that I will obey the orders of the President of the United States and the orders of the officers appointed over me, according to regulations and the Uniform Code of Military Justice. So help me God. "

On July 3, 1968, I arrived at the Armed Forces Examining and Entrance Station in Newark, New Jersey. I spent the preceding days writing an essay that detailed my reasons for opposing the war in Vietnam and why I felt I should not participate. All of twenty-years-old I naïvely believed that this document would convince those in charge that my opposition to the war was real, find me administratively unacceptable, and send me home.

I'll tell you what; it certainly got their attention. After handing it in I was told to go through a final physical examination and wait for further instructions. So, there we were, all these naked guys spreading their buttocks and being asked to cough while medical professionals held their balls and checked for hernias, diseases and abnormalities; an assembly line of naked boys all in the early stages of being disassembled and reconstructed. Nobody looked anybody else in the eye. Discussing it later I found that many felt embarrassed and dehumanized, like cattle being herded to the slaughter. It seemed like everyone who had thus far navigated the Selective Service System without getting deferred or exempted passed the physical with flying colors.

I was singled out and told to report to an office across the hall. Here I met the Officer-in-Charge, who made it very clear he was not too happy having someone upset his otherwise well-oiled machine. He said something like, "I read your stuff; you need to go see the shrink; then come back to see me." Standard practice I learned, but can you imagine?

The shrink and I had a pleasant conversation as he evaluated my mental status to determine if I suffered from any mental diseases which would disqualify me from military service. I was found to be coherent and able to distinguish between right and wrong and although opposed to the war, was not crazy and therefore qualified for induction into the Army.

He did ask why I had not filed for Conscientious Objector status with the Draft Board. I told him I got the paperwork but did not complete it or send it in. I told him I had trouble signing off on the statement asking me to agree that I was "opposed to war in any form." World War II, for example, was often cited as a just war and I was well aware of the horrors, death, and destruction fascism brought to the world and why peoples and nations rose up to stop it. I was also somewhat aware of the Catholic Church's teaching called the "Just War" theory. Believers could use this set of standards to determine whether or not participation in a war was justified. But the secular authorities did not subscribe to the notion of "selective objection" to a particular war. To be classified as a Conscientious Objector one had to be opposed to "war in any form." I struggled mightily with that as a potential draftee, but decided I could not meet that standard and I was not going to lie.

Finally, the shrink scribbled a diagnosis that went something like "Adjustment reaction to adulthood," then added presciently, "The man will follow this through."

So, there I was healthy and apparently not crazy, back in the office with the guy in charge. He was very upset as he asked, "I need to know if you are going to refuse to be inducted. Remember, if you do you will be arrested and tried for refusing induction, a violation of the Universal Training and Service Act." He continued, "If you are going to refuse I want you to do it here, not out there in front of the rest of the guys."

I was not there to make a scene. I certainly was not astute enough or radical enough to realize the impact that such a public demonstration of resistance might have on the other inductees in the room; but he apparently was, and he sure did not want it to be on his watch. The Civil Rights Movement taught me that presenting a vision of society that ran contrary to accepted norms made those in power uncomfortable, perhaps even fearful. I saw a powerful example of this in this man.

At this point he became a bit more "fatherly," suggesting that a number of guys came through there having problems with the war, saying this was not so unusual. He knew that others had difficulty taking the Oath of Enlistment or any oath; that is, swearing in front of God. He suggested that all one needed to do was say "I affirm" rather than "I swear" to the oath, and simply take a step forward when told to do so.

He said, "Look, you are obviously an intelligent and thoughtful guy; you got two years of college under your belt; that means something." "Once you get to Fort Dix they'll give you all these aptitude tests to see how best to use you." He continued, "It's not just killing and blood and guts you know. It takes a lot of support staff to run an efficient army. They can use a guy like you in any number of jobs."

I remember sitting there with my head down, tired of all the dealings with Selective Service, tired of presenting a case that nobody in power wished to recognize, tired with what felt like an endless, lonely fight to get people to look at the war—to really look at the war—and to take action to do something about it.

And then, the coup de grace. "And there's another thing young man. I see you are recently married. Even if the marriage survives, how the hell are you going to provide for your family after a felony conviction, possibly fined $10,000 after serving a three-to-five-year sentence? Who the hell is going to take a chance on you, a 'draft-dodger,' an ex-con? So, c'mon, let's get this over with."

So now it was crunch time. I tallied up the ledger. I had not "dodged" the draft by going underground, though I understood the motives and respected those who did. I refused to pack up and leave the country, stubbornly insisting that the fight to end the war was here, though I admired the courage and commitment that it took for others to do so. I did not look to join the National Guard or Reserves as a way to avoid being drafted, though I knew many who did and truly respected their decision. Similarly, I had great respect for those who entered the service firmly believing that the war was necessary, legal and just.

Indeed, I once had a student deferment and I chose to drop out of college and take my chances with the draft; nobody forced me. I got the Conscientious Objector paper work from Selective Service. However, without the support needed to work through the conundrum of being opposed to "war in any form" I took what I thought was the high road and did not send it in.

It seemed like I'd been walking down the same street and constantly running into a dead end. Perhaps I was wrong and I needed to go down another path. Feeling totally defeated, dropping the ball and in Christian terms, failing to pick up my cross, I told him, "Ok…I'll affirm."

I was aching inside; head down, distraught and defeated I joined the rest of the group on the plush, thick burgundy carpet that covered the floor. The Officer-in-Charge read the Oath of Enlistment. When he came to the part, "I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic." I got off my "pity-pot." That got my attention. Many of us knew that the Vietnamese people posed no threat to our country—we were not defending the Constitution or the country from attack. The conflict did not appear to be constitutional since Congress abdicated their responsibility by not formally declaring war—they sure were not defending the Constitution. So, if the enemies were not foreign, then they just might be domestic—the folks who promoted this war of choice and got us into this mess. Perhaps, just perhaps, something could be done to end the war within the system, within the service. Probably not the best plan, but it lifted my spirits and gave me hope.

As we walked to the bus that was to take us to the Reception Center at Fort Dix, New Jersey, we encountered a tall, serious-looking young man handing out New Testaments. He did not say anything like "Good luck" or "God bless." This was no Bible-thumping evangelist on a soap-box; no self-serving Elmer Gantry preying on people. Still, one suspected to hear the unspoken refrain, "Onward Christian soldier!" escape from his lips. At least that is how I took it and I was mad. But, he just stood there, dour and silent, handing out books as one might deal cards during a tense and critical hand of poker. He did not scream, "Repent" or "Turn back, don't get on that bus!" He just handed out the books. I stopped, looked him dead in the eye and said, "How dare you?" "How could you?" As he reached out once again to hand me the Good Book, I threw up my hand in disgust, took the final few steps and got on the bus.

GERALD R. GIOGLIO, OFS, IS A VVAW MEMBER, SECULAR FRANCISCAN AND AUTHOR OF "DAYS OF DECISION: AN ORAL HISTORY OF CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTORS IN THE MILITARY DURING THE VIETNAM WAR."

A Letter From My Soul, A Letter From My Heart,

GREGORY ROSS

The Veteran, Volume 42, Number 1, Spring 2012, published "Prolonged Exposure Therapy," a piece I wrote about witnessing the shooting death of a young girl in the Philippine Islands shortly after returning from Sea Duty with the 7th Fleet on the Gun Line, a mile off the coast of Viet Nan. Years later I wrote these "letters" to "Matilda," the dead girl; to a Fleet Sailor who had just bought a knock off watch from a Bazaar vendor for $10 and "norx," an appropriately reptilian name for the Philippine constabulary who shot her in the back over the theft of the watch.

Letter to Matilda

I had to call you something besides "The Girl Killed A Few Feet From Me."

Dear Matilda,

I was going to start this letter with the words: "If you had lived, you would be...", but you did not live. You died a violent, disturbing, senseless death. Being an unwilling witness to your death was shocking, psychically grueling, especially for so worthless a reason. It has become clear your death was emotionally destructive not just because you were another human being and a child, but because it symbolized War: an inordinate amount of force used to destroy for a useless reason. Your death was a microcosm of the macrocosm of War.

I am Sorry you were killed so callously. I feel guilty even though we had no interactions that could have caused or prevented your death. Still, you haunt me. War stole my joy for life. I thought I could not go on living. These thoughts and feelings, while not banished, are no longer overpowering. Now I smile and enjoy watching children in the world. I will never forget you, but I have to let you go. Your death was the head of the long, sharp nail of War that pierced my soul. I strive for peace of mind. Where ever your essence may be; I wish you peace.

Letter to a Fleet Sailor

Dear Fleet Sailor,

If you are still alive, I hope you are sane and sober. If you are alive, sane, sober, I know you have sought help. I wish you peace of mind. May you or your offspring never live within a War again.

Wishing you Peace,
Another sailor
Another casualty of War
Another brother harmed.

(I refuse to capitalize, punctuate or normalize anything to do with "norx")

letter to norx i will never stop hating you never be able to see you as human you will always be reptilian delayed of evolution spiritually deficient stunted of humanity atavistic savage stupid lazy cowardly alien you could have done anything besides shoot her you could have let her go you could have chased her figured out how to catch her you could have let her go you did not have to shoot her in the back you could have let her go you could have let her live you could have spared me her death you could have spared me the scars of her death you could have let her go you could have let her live you could have spared me i will never stop suffering rage i can never stop hating you.

GREGORY ROSS WAS IN THE NAVY, VIETNAM; 7TH FLEET, GUN LINE [1969]. PUBLISHED IN ANTHOLOGY: "VETERANS OF WAR, VETERANS OF PEACE," EDITOR, MAXINE HONG KINGSTON

Bitch

Joseph Giannini

Started to lighten up "Joe's World," our basement. It contains almost all my possessions. Including a complete gym with a professional heavy bag. Most of my surfboards. All my criminal case files. Books, magazines, documents, writings. Marine Corps memorabilia.

I'm finding things I haven't seen in years. Like a 2003 *People* magazine with Jessica Lynch on the cover. She looks great. A Marine friend of mine, Staff Sergeant Doug Webb, was nearby when she was captured by Iraqi troops. She sold her story for a million. Doug told me the official version – that Lynch fought off the Iraqis until she ran out of ammo – was total bullshit. Propaganda for Operation Iraqi Freedom.

In Nam there was not one round eye – an American woman – within 250 miles of our Area of Responsibility. There were plenty of Vietnamese women. Some took up arms against us. In February of 1968 my Marine Rifle Platoon killed a female sniper. She had been hiding in the foothills west of our Combat Base. Once I witnessed a squad of Marines, urged on by our Company Commander, murder an unarmed woman. I still hate that son of a bitch.

It is hard to believe that Jessica Lynch resisted until she ran out of ammo and was then taken prisoner. In Nam, we would kill any unfriendly holding a weapon. Once we took a woman prisoner.

February 1968
Quang Tri Province
Republic of South Vietnam

Shortly after the Tet Offensive began, I was given a mission for my Platoon, Delta One: A long Combat Patrol through an area northwest of our Combat Base. We advanced through several small hamlets without incident. Then held our position on the edge of the last hamlet.

Our next checkpoint is a large village. Separated from my platoon by a wide, dry rice paddy. We will be in the open for 300 yards. I look across the paddy and notice the steeple of a large Catholic Cathedral. No signs of life. From here the village appears to be deserted. They may have fled because the North Vietnamese are there, waiting for us to walk into their killing zone.

"What do you think, Lieutenant?" It's Platoon Sergeant Head.

"Don't like it," I respond. "I'll call the Company Commander." I get on my radio. "Delta Six this is Delta One, over."

"Delta One this is Delta Six."

"Six, checkpoint four has no signs of life. Might be an ambush. Request permission to avoid. Or an artillery mission to cover our approach. Delta One over."

"Delta One, positive on the fire mission. Get ready to move out. Six Out."

"Delta One out."

"Sergeant Head, tell the first squad to get ready to move across the paddy. Tell the second and third squads to get on line behind this paddy dike, each with a machine gun team."

Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom! Our artillery is rocking the village. First squad jumps off. Quickly moves across the open ground. So far, so good. Maybe our impacting rounds are keeping the enemy's heads down. But they are known for excellent fire discipline. Second squad is nearing the edge of the village. I radio Six to cease fire.

Second squad enters and signals for the rest of the platoon to come across. We move up and join them in the village. It is completely deserted. I walk into the cathedral. Reminds me of Holy Family back in Brooklyn. The cathedral and rectory are not damaged. All the pews have been knocked over. Bibles, documents and papers are strewn everywhere. Who would believe this back in the World? I'm still looking about when Sergeant Head calls to me. "Lieutenant, we have a prisoner."

I follow him outside. Several Marines have surrounded the prisoner. I walk up and join them. It's a young woman, lying on her back in a shallow ditch. She is clothed completely in black. A large piece of her right thigh has been ripped away by shrapnel. A gaping red crater. She is very quiet. Not crying, pleading, or whimpering. Showing bravery and defiance to her sworn enemy.

I'm looking at her. She catches my stare and holds it. Knows I'm in charge. Will be the one to decide. She must be an NVA forward observer. We got her before she called in a mission on us. Lucky for us. Not so for her.

A Marine nearby says, "Let's waste the bitch."

Another Marine responds, "Dude, it's just a girl."

The first Marine replies, "So what?"

She ignores their banter. She is focused on me. Speaking to me without words. A beautiful warrior in her prime. I shout, "Corpsman up!" I turn away and tell my radio operator, "Call in a Priority Medevac." I turn back to her. Again, she catches my stare. I nod. She nods in response. Warrior to Warrior.

Joseph Giannini is a former Marine grunt who fought in 'Nam 1967-68 with the 1st Battalion, 3rd Marines.

In the Cross-hairs of Racism's Killing Zone, 1968

R G CANTALUPO

Devil* and Lonny were my best friends.

At Firebase Pershing, Lonny and I shared a two-man bunker. He slept on one side, I, the other. Devil lived in the bunker adjacent to us with Lee.

There wasn't anything particularly unusual about this set-up, except that I was white, and Lonny, Devil, and Lee were black, and this was 1968, three years after the war was no longer a "police action," seven months after Martin Luther King's assassination, five month's past Bobby Kennedy's, four months after the country erupted in race riots all across America, and less than a year into the current average of 50,000 draftees per month—mostly blacks, Hispanics, and poor whites—being inducted into the Army and Marines.

Vietnam—a reflection of the fissure in the United States between white and black, rich and poor, the haves and the have-nots—was a booby trap ready to explode if anyone hit the fine filament of the trip-wire called racism.

And, by bunking with Lonny, by Devil and Lonny being my best friends, I put myself right in the cross-hairs of racism's killing zone.

Lonny and I came to the bush together. We were both from California, both high school athletes, both draftees against the war. We'd both grown up poor, raised by single mothers.

Lonny was wiry, lean, not a pound of fat anywhere. His eyes were a shade darker than my own.

I was his opposite. I was husky, short, strong as a pack animal, built for carrying, whereas Lonny's body was built for running. His skin was smooth, unblemished, the color of mahogany.

My skin turned olive-brown in the Vietnam sun.

So, though our skin colors were shades apart, our life experiences and interests were similar.

Besides, we were the FNGs for our first month until more FNGs arrived, and that bound us.

We were sent out on two man listening posts together and eight-man night patrols. We got the shit details together. He poured gasoline into fifty gallon drums while I lit the pungent stew of toilet paper, excrement, and piss, and stirred the soupy shit into flames.

Getting assigned the same bunker in Firebase Pershing was fine with us. We celebrated our first C-ration dinner in our bunker by promising to survive the year together, each covering the other's back when the shit got bad.

Spike*, a red-neck from Arkansas, hated that I lived with a black man. He thought it was somehow sacrilegious, a blasphemy to the white Aryan race. Oh, it was okay to be side by side with a "nigger" in a firefight, to be in the same foxhole together when all hell breaks loose—blood running the same color and all—but living in the same bunker together threatened Spike's notion of being white.

Out in the bush, in a firefight—black or white—brown or red—was just another face behind a weapon, but back in the base camp, red-necked whites and black power blacks clustered together, gathered in bunkers to talk shit about the other.

The red-necked good ole' boys thought Lonny and I were just faggots from California, and for the black power blacks my being white living with a black crossed some imaginary color barrier in their mind, or somehow diminished the power in their black fist.

I didn't give a shit.

I didn't like fist pumping black apostles of hate any more than red-necks.

I was a product of the tenements and saw the war as an equal opportunity killer, everyone wallowed in the same shit, and the enemy didn't care if your skin color was pink or camouflage-green.

So, I didn't see Lonny's shit, piss, sweat and blood any different than my own.

After three weeks in the bush he stank the same as I. The jungle rot between his toes looked as pink and raw as mine and smelled like the same green mold. And all that bullshit about black cocks being bigger than whites was put to rest one night when Devil, Lonny, and I got drunk and decided to have a contest.

I had an inch at least on Lonny, and my cock was thicker, but Devil put us both to shame.

I wasn't surprised. Devil was a big man. He was 6'2" and weighed over two-hundred fifty pounds. His thighs, biceps, head, neck, and yes, cock, were almost double the size of either Lonny's or mine. Black had nothing to do with it, bigness did.

Because Devil, Lonny and I hung out together there were rifts on both sides of the color divide.

Spike called me a nigger lover. He never said that to my face, but I heard the whispers and snickers as I passed by his bunker on his red-neck beer and poker nights at Pershing. The red-neck white bunkers seemed to be situated close to each other, four or five with Southern and Mid-Western whites bunkered together. Boys from Idaho and Montana, dumb as cows. Some came from rural towns whose only contact with a black man might have been in a high school football game, and were mostly followers. They were more ignorant than racist, but with someone like Spike instigating, they could be just as bad as their granddaddies in a white hood.

Out in the field, prejudices slipped under the mask of fear and hyper-vigilance, but in Pershing, the masks came off as the pot and beer came on. Rumors, petty gossip, prejudices flew like incoming mortars. And, by late 1968 there was a lot of shit flying around, both real and imagined.

Spike came up to me one afternoon after we'd come back from the Ho Bo Woods.

"I hear you're a darkie like your buddies."

"What the fuck does that mean?"

"I don't care mind you, darkies and Creoles all the same to me. I fucked a Creole from Louisiana once. Best piece of ass I ever had. She was just a shade darker than you but was still half-nigger blood."

"I'm Sicilian if that's what you mean. A lot of Sicilian's have black blood in their family history. Black Sicilians we call them."

"What the fuck is a Black Sicilian?"

"Means we have Moor blood running through our veins."

"More than what?"

"Moors. Black Arabs. Sicily was ruled by Moors for a couple of hundred years."

"Is that why some of you Wops have kinky hair?"

"I'm Sicilian, not Italian. And we don't have frizzy hair. We have curly hair."

"But these black Arabs were niggers weren't they?"

"Only you dumb motherfuckers call people niggers. We call the Moors Moors."

"What the fuck is that supposed to mean?"

"Means the only niggers I see are white."

"Niggers don't have white skin."

"Niggers come in all colors, but mostly they come in white skin with Southern drawls like they have shit in their mouth when they talk. And there's only one thing all niggers have in common, Spike. They are all fucking dumb. They look in the mirror and see God's children and don't realize God ain't as fucking dumb as their stupid faces. Niggers are so fucking dumb they forget God only had one child and he was a Jew."

"Yeah, well where I come from you're a nigger. You live with niggers. You smell like a nigger. And one day you're gonna die like a nigger."

"Watch your back, Spike. One day that M-60 might jamb on you and you're gonna need a nigger like me to save your nigger ass."

**Devil and Spike were nicknames.*

RG Cantalupo (Ross Canton) was an RTO (Radio Operator) for an infantry company in the 25th Infantry Division, 1968-69. He was awarded three Purple Hearts and a Bronze Star with a Combat V for Valor for courage under fire. His memoir, "The Light Where Shadows End," was published in May, 2016. "In the Cross-hairs of Racism's Killing Zone, 1968" is an excerpt.

Scognamilio

Richard Brummett

I was so very pleased to see Scognamilio appear on Hill 29 in the spring of 1968 even if he was not trained to do my job. The First Sergeant had escorted him to our residential bunker and told me to make this guy a tank driver.

Yes, I was short and Scognamilio was my replacement. Fortunately for him he was two months early and I had plenty of time to teach him how to be the driver of an M48A3 tank. 52 tons of ugly beauty, which, I promised, would keep him alive for 12 months.

It did not. Thirty hours after letting go of that tank I was in Chu Lai processing out of the squadron when the word reached the rear that A-35 had detonated an exceptionally large land mine. There were no survivors.

At Cam Ranh Bay I waded into the warm ocean and cried into the waters.

The flight home across the Pacific was not as euphoric as it might have been.

Scognamilio and I were both from New York City so I was able to contact his family and later attend the funeral. A funeral delayed a month after his death as he was listed as "missing in action."

The mental picture the family had constructed from what the Army told them was of a tank found in the jungle with its engine idling and the crew having wandered off. There was no jungle; no idling tank; no curious, dismounted crew following suspicious footprints. Reality was a column of a traumatized armored cavalry platoon with its lead vehicle gone in a fireball.

Later, they would find nearby a broken open 1,000-pound bombshell that had failed to explode on impact. Copious peanut shells suggested some enterprising VC had scrapped all the explosives out of it and ate peanuts as they worked.

Still on active duty, I travelled to the Pentagon. After much walking through endless corridors I finally found a kindly major who had Scognamilio's folder open on his desk. All they had that they were sure was Scognamilio were his eyeglasses and his left hand. I politely but firmly told the major it was time.

The Italian funeral in Brooklyn was about what I expected complete with grandma trying to open the casket. Many tears.

The next year I returned to college where Scognamilio would visit in my dreams. He was working on the tank's track and wanted my help with the maintenance. I knew what he really wanted.

So, in May of 1970 I bought a ticket to Saigon on Pan Am. I managed to get myself accredited with MACV as a photojournalist, which gave me the run of the war, and, as a noncombatant, a prohibition from touching any weaponry.

In July, a chopper dropped me off next to an armored column in the field, A Troop, First Squadron, First Cavalry, which was the very same troop in which I had served two years previously. The captain altered their route at my request and the multi-piece wreck of A-35 came into view.

In 1968, our practice was to ride on the top of the turret until small arms fire was directed at us since we were more fearful of land mines than of bullets. The driver, down in the hull, did not have that option. So, when A-35 detonated that mine the turret crew was blown clear, although dead. The inverted hull, minus the turret, burned all day and prevented the platoon from retrieving his body. Lingering in that area after nightfall seemed unwise so the LT had the platoon move on.

No one went back for Scognamilio until two years and a few days had passed. We found most of him behind the steering wheel of the tank. His dog tags were in his bootlaces so we knew it was he. Since there was a grave on Long Island with his name on it I did not want to inflict another funeral on the family. Maybe I made the wrong choice but the cavalry troopers dug a resting place in the good earth for him and the many fragments of the other crew members found scattered about.

I knew that someday the war would end and the A-35 with him in it would be hauled off to China to be melted down into dishwashers or whatever. I did not want that indignity inflicted upon my friend.

In the past eleven years, I have traveled to Vietnam ten times. I have established relationships with Vietnamese and made myself useful as a photographer to various NGOs. More meaningful has been the Dragoon Scholarship Fund I established for poor children in one of the many rice-farming villages Scognamilio and I "visited" in 1968. Primary and secondary education is not free in Vietnam, but as of September 2017, fifty children are attending school thanks to the generosity of both veterans of that war and kindly others.

In conjunction with the Dragoon Fund there is an annual bit of organized silliness that involves chocolate. Lots of it in both solid and creamy formats. I have also told the children of An Sơn about the famous humanoids of the Pacific Northwest forests of my homeland and their interest in the happiness of human children. Races are held in honor of Ông Chân To (Mr. Foot Big) with the winning teams being awarded the traditional red envelope with three crisp U.S. $2 bills (which are considered very lucky in Vietnam.)

All of these activities have helped put Patrick Scognamilio to rest and he doesn't visit my dreams anymore.

Richard Brummett has been a tank driver, cab driver, photographer, and postmaster. He is a life member of VVAW and lives in Bellingham, Washington.

Lễ Hội Sô-Cô-La Mỹ Hằng Năm Lần Thứ Tám
Eighth Annual American Chocolate Ceremony
hello
THE CHILDREN OF THE HILL 29 AREA
SAY
CẢM ƠN!
TO
THE DONORS OF THE
DRAGOON SCHOLARSHIP FUND
Children of Việt Nam
Building Bright Futures
www.childrenofvietnam.org/dragoon/
FIRST CAVALRY REGIMENT
FOUNDED IN 1833 AS THE
REGIMENT OF DRAGOONS
NGÀY 12 THÁNG 03 NĂM 2017 AN SƠN, BÌNH AN, THĂNG BÌNH, QUẢNG NAM, VIỆT NAM MARCH 12, 2017

The Veteran is the Key to Peace

Stanley Campbell

Veterans know the ugliness of war. They also know the expense and long-term costs. Many wounded veterans are given short shrift by their government, especially now with cuts in Veterans Administration funding. But veterans are the key, I believe, to ending war, and VVAW a vehicle.

I volunteered for the US Army because I was a 19 year old "patriot" and wanted to stop the Communist advance. I arrived in Vietnam in October of 1971, and served a one-year tour. While there, I saw the horrors of war and was turned off by our government's attempt at democratization. I believe that veterans, who returned from that war and protested, stopped that conflict. The country's most lasting image is former American soldiers throwing their medals back at Congress.

Let me tell you two stories.

The US embargoed Vietnam immediately after they lost the war. But some of us Vietnam veterans returned in spite of, and in opposition to, those sanctions. I returned in 1988 with the second Vietnam Veterans Against the War Friendship Tour. There were five of us, ranging from a truck driver with stomach cancer (most likely due to Agent Orange), two infantrymen and two clerks. We went to Tay-Ninh Province where we were met by a Vietnamese general who didn't like us former American soldiers. He'd been ordered to show us around.

We'd been pretty well received up until then by our former enemies. But this one general kept us waiting and then, with a flurry of Jeeps and dust, showed up and asked us where we wanted to go. The leader of the group, David Cline, formerly of the 4th Infantry Division, said, "Black Magic Mountain."

That didn't set at all well with the general. We roared off down the road and, after a number of miles, the vegetation became sparser. Agent Orange was the cause. We came upon a bleak landscape in front of a tall black hill. The general approached David and began accusing him of "killing (his) best friends." David returned the epithets, and I thought they were going to re-fight the war.

We were driven around to the back of the mountain, the side that David never saw before. We dismounted in the middle of a Vietnamese military graveyard. I grabbed Dave and the other guys, and we stood in front of a monument to their dead (I'd seen how they honored their fallen in Hanoi), lit incense sticks and placed them on top of the markers. We said a short impromptu prayer, and when we turned around, I saw the general was crying! "The war is over with me." And then, surprise! - he took us out to lunch. Such a party we never expected!

Next veterans story:

While in Sarajevo 10 years later, I met veterans from that war-torn city's defense. I told them about veterans reconciling in Vietnam and vowing never to fight again. They heard me, and told stories of enlisting for the defense of their homeland, but one year later, hating the war. I encouraged them to seek out veterans on the other side and make a promise never to fight again. I was met with silence. "One of the soldiers shooting at me had been my best friend," said a sullen-faced combat veteran. I realized that veterans, though having the power of making peace, sometimes hold onto that war.

With Veterans Day coming, I want to ask the veterans out there to serve one more time in the cause of this country. That cause is to bring peace into the world. I call on veterans to join with the usual crowds, but wear some type of peace insignia, and ask to say a prayer for the strength and courage to end war, maybe in our lifetime. Just a short prayer, one that may be taken home.

Stanley Campbell is the director of Rockford Urban Ministries in Rockford Illinois.

This is Peru

Louis De Benedette

In 1984, Guadalupe placed her hand over the photo of her husband, Eladio, who was a Desapariciones Forzadas (forced disappeared) a year earlier in 1983 by the Peruvian Military. Her smallest children Liz and Nora were next to her. Guadalupe told me that her children had thought their father was still working in the mountains. Eladio was a union organizer at the Ayacucho Hospital.

There was a war going on between Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path) and the Army. It became a 20-year war. Guadalupe was a Human Rights monitor and she felt that both the Army and Sendero were wrong.

I first met Guadalupe in 1984 when I had gone to Peru with fellow VVAW member Fr. Joseph Ryan. Guadalupe was a member of SERPAJ (Service for Peace and Justice), which was a radical group composed of priests and nuns, all of who were indigenous Native Guechua.

Guadalupe and I wrote to each other when I was not in Peru. She had been imprisoned in 1987 on a false charge. She had to flee to Chile for her safety. She asked me to be the godfather to her four children. Among the Native Catholics, the godfather is greatly honored and respected. Even to this day I am humbled by the love and respect of my godchildren.

In 1988, Guadalupe returned to Peru and went home to Ayacucho to be with her children. She told me in a letter she was very ill with tuberculosis.

Shortly after I attended an event at Kent State. Barry Romo had invited two paralyzed Nicaraguan veterans I had invited to the States and me to attend. I received notice from my sister that Guadalupe was a Desapariciones Forzadas (forced disappeared)on June 10, 1990. I had to go to Peru. When I arrived, I found out that 17 hooded military broke into their home and took Guadalupe while she was in bed with her young daughter. Needless to say, the children were terrorized as they tried to stop the intruders. In Peru after eighteen hours if one does not return they are considered dead. When I spoke to the Ambassador, Anthony Quainton in the end he said, she was a dead Desapariciones Forzadas and they considered her a member of a communist group. I guess in a corrupt government like the one in Peru, radical Catholics are considered terrorists.

In 1990, before going back to Peru, I solicited many members of Congress and received letters from many on behalf of Guadalupe. There was a meeting over the children, who were now orphans. Aunt Maria, Guadalupe's sister was to take the children with her. I was to be their sole support financially. During the next ten years, I visited the children each year. We vacationed at the Missionaries Retreat. I spent those years protesting at the SOA (School of the Americas) since they train Latin American soldiers in torture and forced disappearances.

During those years, my 18-year-old god daughter Liz visited me and we attended the VVAW 30th Anniversary in Chicago. She befriended Barry's daughter and they got along quite well. Her brother Alvaro also came here and attended my trial for my activities against the SOA in Georgia.

In 1999, I needed to take Gonzalo to Nicaragua, seeing that the Peruvian military intended to draft him into the Army. My other god daughter Nora is hoping to come visit me in January.

In 2001, the war ended between Sendero and the army. I obtained letters of introduction from VVAW members Dave Cline and Ben Chitty. These letters proved to be very important since a Truth and Reconciliation commission had begun. Identity was a must and VVAW was trusted and well-respected. The war had 70,000 dead or disappeared. All were indigenous Native people. There were also 11,000 Sendero dead.

My godchildren wanted justice not reconciliation. The Truth Commission made no demands for court appearances and did not recommend any prison time. Until this day, the relatives of the disappeared including my godchildren want justice.

My godchildren have become young adults. They are married and have seven children between them. I am also the godfather of these children. Nora is in law school, Liz is a teacher, Gonzalo is an architect and Alvaro has a photo copy office. They continue to struggle for justice and are members of the Relatives of the Desapariciones Forzadas. I have always been there for them even when I could not return to Peru.

Louis' goddaughters holding a picture of their mother Guadalupe and their father Eladio.

On August 18, 2017, an important event took place in the Court in Lima, the capital of Peru. After twelve years of trial, a seven-hour reading of an extensive sentencing and several short recesses, the National Criminal Chambers of the Judiciary handed down sentences against torture and forced disappearances. There were also extra judicial executions of 53 indigenous Native people in 1983 at the Los Cabitos Interrogation Military Base in Ayacucho. One of those victims was Eladio, the father of my godchildren. According to a witness, he was water boarded and died.

The measures taken by the Judges in charge of the Cabitos case included a 23-year prison sentence for Pedro Paz, Chief of Intelligence, and a 30-year prison sentence to Humberto Bari, Chief of Los Cabitos. Neither Paz nor Bari reported for sentencing. The Judges issued orders of capture. As of writing this, they are both on the run.

Roy Bourgeois, a Vietnam veteran and founder of the SOA Watch, discovered that four of those sentenced were SOA grads at Ft. Benning, Ga. Two were considered mentally ill, two were dead and another was a fugitive. Roy also said there are about 4,583 Peru graduates at the SOA from 1944-2004. No names were allowed after that. It's no wonder why Peru was notorious for killing Native people, which make up 62% of the population.

My godchildren were at the sentencing and they were content that justice was done for their father. They were sad for the others that did not get justice. Bodies had been cremated and it was impossible to prove they were Desapariciones Forzadas. In all, it was a victory to stop military violence on the native population.

The struggle goes on and my godchildren are in that struggle for their mother and all the Desapariciones Forzadas. I am proud of them and I respect the relatives of all the Desapariciones Forzadas in Peru.

I am extremely grateful to VVAW and especially to Marty Webster who understands my pain and the pain of the Native peoples of Peru.

Louis De Benedette is a long-time member of VVAW. On October 6, 2017, he hosted a "Veterans Speakout" in commemoration of 16 years of the Afghanistan war in Greenwood Park in downtown Ithaca, NY.

Living with War Everyday

O God, where is this thing called peace
That humankind may find release?
—Carl Armin Viehe

Fiery rhetoric fuels the flames of war. Better there than here. The right war, the right time, the right place. Bring 'em on.

Thousands of bodies in the ground
Brought home in boxes to a trumpets sound

Bombs fall on Samarra, Quang Nam, Yuhmour and Haifa. Civilian casualties mount. Leaders invoke God when speaking of a war that involves maiming and killing of innocent people.

Thousands of children scarred for life
Millions of tears for a soldier's wife

The procession of flag draped coffins is endless. A grieving mother stands near an open grave. The echo of taps marks the end of another soldier's life.

—Barry Reece

(The lyrics in italics credited to Neil Young.)

Another Anti-War Poem

War can be likened to standing next
To a person with bad gas
in an elevator.
It will erupt sooner or later.
And the smell will eventually hit your nose.
But the stench of war just grows and grows.

At least in an elevator
You can hold your breath.
But you cannot do that on a battlefield
Because war is death, war is death.

Eventually the elevator door will open
And you can leave and get some fresh air But on the field of battle
The dead are just lying there
Stinking in the Sun.
And the elevator of war
Makes another run,makes another run.

—Roger Forkel

Where We Came From, Who We Are, Who Can Join

Vietnam Veterans Against the War, Inc. (VVAW) is a national veterans' organization that was founded in New York City in 1967 after six Vietnam vets marched together in a peace demonstration. It was organized to voice the growing opposition among returning servicemen and women to the still-raging war in Indochina, and grew rapidly to a membership of over 30,000 throughout the United States, including active duty GIs stationed in Vietnam. Through ongoing actions and grassroots organization, VVAW exposed the ugly truth about US involvement in Southeast Asia and our first-hand experiences helped many other Americans to see the unjust nature of that war.

VVAW also took up the struggle for the rights and needs of veterans. In 1970, we began the first rap groups to deal with traumatic aftereffects of war, setting the example for readjustment counseling at vet centers today. We exposed the shameful neglect of many disabled vets in VA hospitals and helped draft legislation to improve educational benefits and create job programs. VVAW fought for amnesty for war resisters, including vets with bad discharges. We helped make known the negative health effects of exposure to chemical defoliants and the VA's attempts to cover up these conditions as well as their continued refusal to provide treatment and compensation for many Agent Orange victims.

Today our government still finances and arms undemocratic and repressive regimes around the world in the name of "democracy." American troops have again been sent into open battle in the Middle East and covert actions in Latin America, for many of the same misguided reasons that were used to send us to Southeast Asia. Meanwhile, many veterans from all eras are still denied justice—facing unemployment, discrimination, homelessness, post-traumatic stress disorder and other health problems, while already inadequate services are cut back or eliminated.

We believe that service to our country and communities did not end when we were discharged. We remain committed to the struggle for peace and for social and economic justice for all people. We will continue to oppose senseless military adventures and to teach the real lessons of the Vietnam War. We will do all we can to prevent future generations from being put through a similar tragedy, and we will continue to demand dignity and respect for veterans of all eras. This is real patriotism and we remain true to our mission. Anyone who supports this overall effort, whether Vietnam veteran or not, veteran or not, may join us in this long-term struggle. JOIN US!

created by Robert Spicher

Insignia of Vietnam Veterans Against the War

We took the MACV patch as our own, replacing the sword with the upside-down rifle with helmet, the international symbol of soldiers killed in action. This was done to expose the lies and hypocrisy of US aggression in Vietnam as well as its cost in human lives. The original MACV insignia also put forward lies. The US military was not protecting (the sword) the Vietnamese from invasion from the People's Republic of China (the China Gates), but was instead trying to "save" Vietnam from itself.

Our insignia has come to represent veterans fighting against new "adventures" like the Vietnam War, while at the same time fighting for a decent way of life for veterans and their families.

Our insignia is over 46 years old. The insignia, VVAW® and Vietnam Veterans Against the War, Inc.® are registered trademarks belonging to VVAW and no other organization or group may use it for any reason without written permission from the VVAW Board of Directors.

Beware of VVAW-AI

This notice is to alert you to a handful of individuals calling themselves the "Vietnam Veterans Against the War Anti-Imperialist" (VVAW-AI). VVAW-AI is actually the creation of an obscure ultraleft sect, designed to confuse people in order to associate themselves with VVAW's many years of activism and struggle. They are not a faction, caucus or part of VVAW, Inc. and are not affiliated with us in any way. We urge all people and organizations to beware of this bogus outfit.

SUPPORT VVAW!
DONATE OR JOIN TODAY!

Vietnam Veterans Against the War, Inc.
VVAW Membership
P.O. Box 355
Champaign, IL 61824-0355

Membership Application

Name _____
Address _____
City _____ State _____ Zip _____
Phone _____
Email address _____
Branch _____
Dates of Service (if applicable) _____
Unit _____
Military Occupation _____
Rank _____
Overseas Duty _____
Dates _____

☐ Yes, add me to the VVAW email list.
☐ I do not wish to join, but wish to make a donation to the work of VVAW.
☐ Sign me up for a lifetime membership in VVAW. $250 is enclosed.

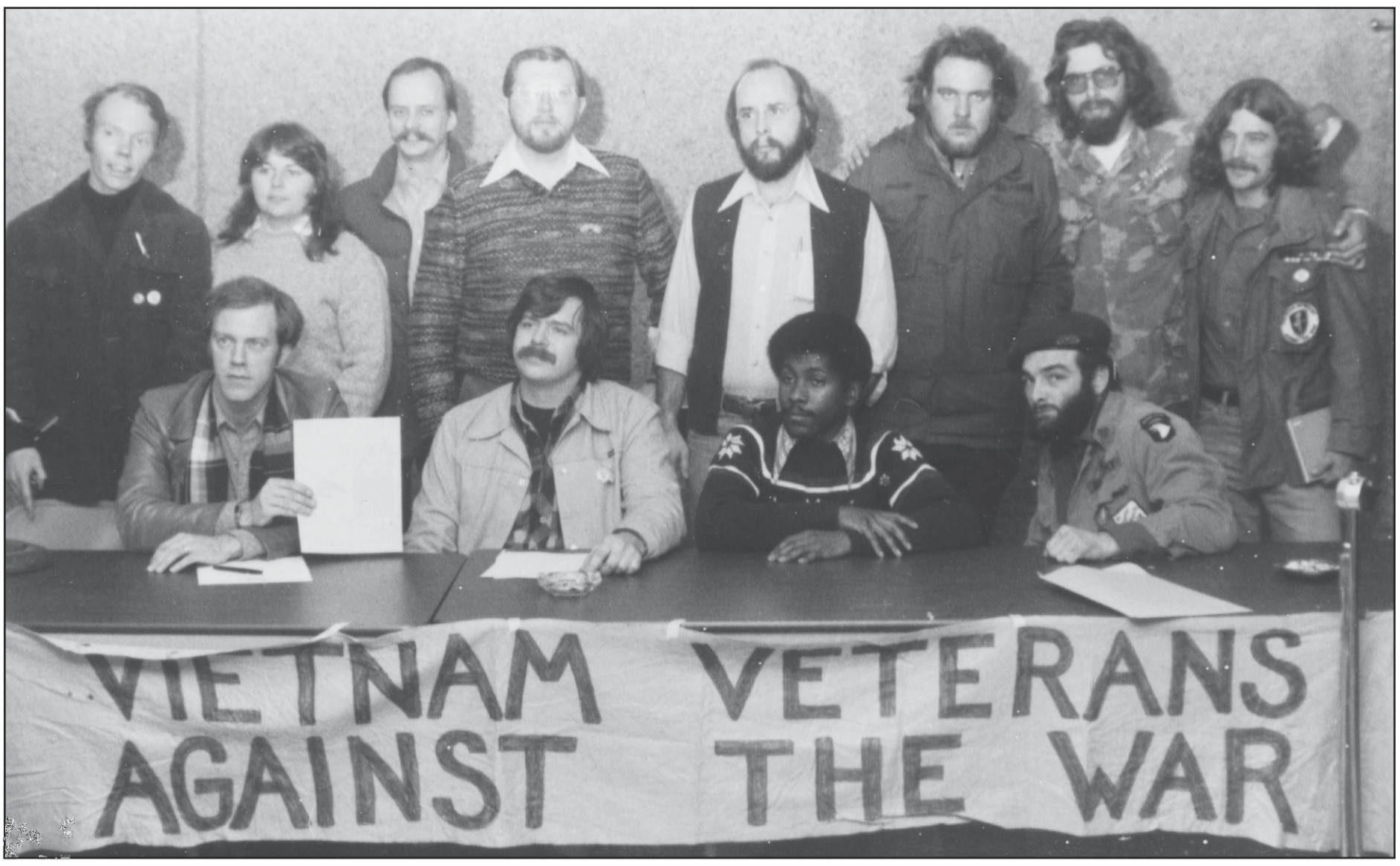
Membership in VVAW is open to ALL people who want to build a veterans' movement that fights for peace and justice and support the work of VVAW and its historic legacy. Most of our members are veterans of the Vietnam era, but we welcome veterans of all eras, as well as family members and friends to our ranks. The annual membership fee is $25.00 (not required of homeless, unemployed or incarcerated vets).

Signature _____

Date _____

Total Amount Enclosed _____

Make checks payable to VVAW. Contributions are tax-deductible.



RECOLLECTIONS

1972 Republican Convention

WILLIAM SHELTON

Our vacation was over and it was back to politics.

About two weeks later, George, Ralph and I loaded ourselves into George's van and began a three-day drive to Miami Beach to participate in the festivities surrounding the Republican National Convention. We would be joining nearly five thousand other street delegates, including a large VVAW contingent. Linda hadn't been able to get any more time off from work, so Janet came up to stay with her while we were gone.

As we neared Miami, we saw cars, vans, trucks, all filled with long-hairs, apparently headed in the same direction. There were hundreds of others hitchhiking. We crammed as many as we could into the van.

Things got off to a rapid start. Shortly after we arrived at Flamingo Park, where we had created a "liberated zone", six members of the American Nazi Party seized the stage. The crowd, filled with hippies, yippies, zippies and other assorted malcontents from American society, was angry. Our space had been defiled.

Security at the park fell to VVAW. We quickly cordoned off the stage, cleared a pathway to the entrance of the park and ejected the Nazis in a somewhat less than gentle fashion.

"Can you imagine that. Either they're idiots, want to become martyrs, or both," a young woman cried out.

"They don't know how close they came," a brother shot back.

On Monday, we marched on a high school where members of the Florida National Guard were housed. Three thousand men had been called out to provide security for the other side. Many of the protesters wanted to trash the place. VVAW wanted dialogue, so we linked arms and placed ourselves between the school and the crowd. We protected the protectors.

While speeches were being made, a guardsman tossed a note down to us, which was read to the crowd: "We just want you to know that there are brothers in here too."

At least some of the Guardsmen didn't want to confront us in the streets.

On Tuesday, we marched from the park to the Fontainbleau Hotel, the Republican party's convention headquarters. We were led by Ron Kovic, a Marine who was paralyzed from the waist down, and two other wheelchair-bound vets. Twelve hundred veterans, marching in formation, followed in total silence. A single banner identified us as Vietnam Veterans Against the War.

Though we had not sought permission for this march, the police immediately blocked traffic and coordinated our route. It was ninety-eight degrees. People lined the streets, applauding as we went by. As we marched, jugs of water began appearing, handed to us by people along the way. They were quickly drained, handed back, refilled, and passed on again. Not a word was said. None were needed.

Elderly men and women stared down at us from the balconies of their apartments. And we marched. Solemnly marched. As we neared our destination, a Miami Beach police community relations officer was spotted wearing a VVAW button. And we marched.

We rounded the final corner, broke ranks and gathered in a circle at the entrance to the hotel grounds. Florida state troopers in riot gear stood four deep, guarding the gate. Ron was handed a megaphone.

"We're tired of a government that has lied to us, that sent us off to a war and forgot about us when we came home."

It began to rain, but nobody moved. Kovic's words cut through us like a whip.

"You have lied to us too long, you have burned too many babies. You may have taken our bodies, but you haven't taken our minds!"

We roared with approval. Earlier some of the brothers had talked about rushing the hotel. Had Kovic given the word, nothing could have stopped us.

The next night we rioted. Not all of the brothers were in agreement, but most of us took to the streets anyway.

"You're playing into the government's hands," one shouted.

Another replied, "Hell, man, this is a night the country's gonna remember."

We used hit and run tactics, blocking the streets, attempting to keep the delegates from reaching a quorum. The authorities were ready for us. Buses filled with riot police were stationed near the convention center. They descended from the buses and began advancing, driving us back. I saw a rock, picked it up and hurled it with all my might.

We zig zagged from intersection to intersection, blocking traffic, dispersing as the riot squads charged. Clouds of tear gas filled the air. We regrouped as they charged the next intersection, dispersing others who had regrouped while we were being charged. We bounced them back and forth between us.

Phalanxes of state troopers on motorcycles swung through the streets, swinging clubs as they chased demonstrators. I was cut off as we retreated toward Flamingo Park. I dove under some bushes. A trooper dismounted, apparently thinking he saw someone dart around the corner. He was so close I could have reached out and touched his leg. A hand came out of nowhere and grabbed mine. Another demonstrator, a woman I had never seen before nor would ever see again, was sharing my refuge.

Electricity filled the air. As the night wore on, as the paddy wagons were filled and emptied and filled again, we continued. Brothers and sisters greeted each other now with "Revolution in '76."

Twelve hundred people were arrested, but I was not among that number.

WILLIAM SHELTON IS AN AIR FORCE VETERAN AND A LIFE-TIME MEMBER OF VVAW.

OK... NOW WE GOT NUKES, DICTATORS, NATIONALISM, FEAR, LOATHING, AND NEO-NAZIS!
ALL WE NEED IS SOME IGNORANT, SELF-AGGRANDIZING, IDIOT TO TAKE THE FIRST STEP!
HMM?
WAR
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